

UNDERSTANDING REFORM PROJECT FAILURE IN THE UK; A MORPHOGENETIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Government reform projects fail at an alarming rate (Cabinet Office, 2014), wasting billions of pounds in public spending and sustaining what has been termed the “performance paradox” (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003, p.3). The paradox suggests that despite ever increasing numbers and magnitudes of major projects, the rate of failure continues to grow too. In addressing this paradox, this research responds to Flyvbjerg’s (2001), call for phronetic social science that concerns itself with society’s improvement and enters into public dialogue and praxis. In so doing, the research promotes a second order approach to understanding project failure to challenge taken-for-granted evaluation processes and concerns itself with working towards improving what and how we learn lessons.

The study presents a detailed and reflexive account of an exemplar case of Government project failure, from an alternative perspective. The case exposes the political conceptualisations underpinning unsuccessful attempts to regionalise parts of the English fire service via the structural reform project called ‘FiReControl¹’. The FiReControl project was initiated in 2004 under the Labour Government and was cancelled by the Coalition Government in 2010. The Public Accounts Committee inquiry into the failure of FiReControl labelled it one of the worst cases of project failure that the Committee had seen (Hodge, Public Accounts Committee, 2011), and blamed project and ministerial department staff for the failure.

The research challenges the adequacy of taken-for-granted evaluations of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), that typically finds project delivery agents to blame after reform projects are considered to have failed. A phronetic approach would be sceptical of the PAC methodology alone to provide definitive answers after reform projects fail, since social and particularly political actions from which reform projects emerge, are complex and unfold over time in the unobservable realms of Government institutions. A truer understanding of reform projects requires knowledge of both their context and their history emergence (Archer, 1995), that is not accessible through theory alone (Flyvbjerg et al. 2012).

The intention of this study was to explore these concepts of time and context to ascertain if alternative theoretical perspectives and analytic methods can help us to understand more about

¹ The FiReControl logo will be written as such throughout this manuscript for consistency. The capitalisation represented the ‘*F*ire and *R*esilience’ section of Department of Communities and Local Government and *C*ontrol being the fire service function that was to be regionalised under the reform.

why many large-scale public reform projects do not complete successfully, or are considered failures. A fundamental concept underpinning the research was ontological, asking not just where project failure begins, but also, what exactly is project failure. The study premised its perspective of reform project failure on the idea of it being a loss of support, or a loss of legitimacy and not an objective state of reality (McConnell, 2003). The study departs from traditional ‘flat ontology’ of much foundationalist and resource-based research and evaluation in the field and set out to explore where and how legitimacy for FiReControl began, what sustained it and by what power the final, contested reform idea was approved. The approach sought to reveal more of the power-relations that underlie policy reforms, working beneath the more obvious levels of policy-effectiveness assessment found in conventional post-project evaluation approaches.

Using the overarching philosophy of critical realism, the realist social theory method approach of the morphogenetic sequence (Archer, 1995), is adopted, as well as critical hermeneutic methods, to operationalise the idea that society consists of parts and people, the social and the individual, structures and agents.

The methods revealed changing situational logics (Archer, 1995), as organisational relations ebbed and flowed across the sequence of events. The logics influenced the decisions and actions of agents which served their vested interests to a greater or lesser extent, depending on which groups held more agency at the time. The hermeneutic analyses of key texts revealed how the Government was not only predisposed to act by the institutional legitimacy of new public management, but also how powerful legitimating devices were deployed to further their ideas over any alternatives. The methods gave explanatory power to understanding the emergent properties of mechanisms of legitimacy and institutionalism in building support for structural reform. Moreover, the methods revealed the power by which Government ideas finally succeeded in 2004, where they had failed in 1999, by the morphogenesis (transformation), of corporate agency. Corporate agents promote their own interests to define and redefine organisational goals; they “pack more punch in defining and redefining structural forms” (Archer, 1995, p. 191). The influence of these mechanisms in shaping the FiReControl project, regardless of any reliable evidence to suggest the reform could succeed, was not explored by the Public Accounts Committee.

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In memory of my mum,

whose love of reading anything and everything rubbed off.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The failure of the FiReControl¹ project: *“This is one of the worst cases of project failure that the Committee has seen in many years”* (Hodge, Public Accounts Committee, 2011, p.3).

1.0 Introduction and background

The high failure rate of Government projects in the public sector and in particular those that are designed to implement Government policy through organisational reform is a putative reality, especially amongst the large-scale change programmes underpinned by complex IT systems. The ‘performance paradox’ (Flyvbjerg et al. 2003, p.3) of major projects describes this phenomenon; the more projects and the bigger they are, the more they seem to suffer from extremely poor records of accomplishment (Morrow et al. 1988).

Evaluating and learning the right lessons after public projects fail is not an easy undertaking. In the UK policy cycle framework, evaluation attempts are made to learn lessons after the implementation phase are fed back into the decision-making process. This is supposed to ensure Government action is continually refined to reflect what best achieves objectives and promotes the public interest (HM Treasury, 2014). Ontologically, there appears a taken for granted acceptance that rational, clearly defined objectives indicate capacity for effective achievement of goals and in the event of failure, equally rational goal oriented evaluation will provide sufficient evidence on attribution and causality (Sanderson, 2000). This research suggests that such approaches may not only be inaccurate but quite misleading and may be part of the reason why the projects paradox remains a reoccurring feature of public spending in this area.

Extant literature and sources of understanding in UK Government project failure generally assume a positivist approach based on foundationalist principles of project management and evaluation. These approaches generally subscribe to the ‘flat ontological’ position that conflates structure with agency (Archer, 1995) and generally reveal determinants of reform failure in terms of delivery agents’ behaviours at implementation stages. In light of the fact that reform projects continue to fail, this research suggests there is potential to promote an alternative perspective that does not see failure as an absolute *objective* reality, ‘caused’ only by delivery *agents*, *during* the project itself.

The empirical case for this research was a project called FiReControl, a major transformation programme in the English fire service, designed to implement Government policy through organisational reform and technology. The research was prompted by my own professional experiences in the field of emergency services technology transformation programmes, of which five years were spent delivering the FiReControl project. The project was launched in 2004 by the Labour Government's Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). Following a series of delays and difficulties, the project was cancelled in December 2010 by the Coalition Government with none of the original objectives achieved and a minimum of £469 million being wasted (Public Accounts Committee, 2011).

Critical of foundationalist perspectives that viewed FiReControl as a failed project, the research introduces an alternative theoretical lens for the case. Institutional theory and its key constructs can be used to view failure as a loss of legitimacy and from here the research asks where and how legitimacy for reform projects begin. To explore reform project failure in this way requires knowing not just about the parts and the people involved in delivering reforms but also those involved in idealising, shaping and ultimately legitimating them and this requires an approach that recognises that the entities of social life, the parts (structure) and people (agents), are 'analytically separable' (Archer, 1996, p.xvi). Based on critical realist philosophy (Bhaskar, 1977), the morphogenetic sequence approach of realist social theory (Archer, 1995), and critical hermeneutic methods, the complex interplay of parts and people were analysed over a designated time sequence and conceptualised over multiple levels of reality (Bhaskar, 1978).

In seeking to understand more about the failure of reform projects, the research uses the empirical case to illustrate the process of legitimation by illuminating its context-rich backstory (Suddaby, 2015) using the morphogenetic sequence approach. From this analytic perspective different questions can be asked of the genesis and legitimation of FiReControl that may have influenced its framing and ultimately its capacity for successful implementation. Using this methodological framework, the back story of the FiReControl reform project was told from the five years that preceded its approval in 2004. A morphogenetic approach can reveal shifts in the situational logics between key agents (the fire service, the unions and the government), that predispose them to courses of action in efforts to protect vested interests (Archer, 1995). Using institutional theory constructs as a lens, these decisions and actions either enabled or constrained legitimacy of ideas between the groups. The methods also expose the power-relations that underlay the project, working beneath the more obvious levels of project management or delivery assessment.

Using the empirical case to illustrate the complex interplay of cultures, structures and agents in the shaping of a reform project and the power shifts that constrained and enabled its legitimisation, the study makes wider contributions.

The research makes contributions to the project management and evaluation fields by challenging taken-for-granted assumptions that project failure is an objective state of reality that exists, and that causes of failure can only be found within the boundary of the implementation stages of project itself.

The methods to operationalise the philosophical approach (critical hermeneutics and the morphogenetic approach), are both under theorised in the projects' field. This unique layering of methods makes a methodological contribution that exposes causal mechanisms that constrain or enable agents in ways that conventional methods typically cannot, since the scope of their inquiry is limited to personal accounts and financial audits. Their application in this study enabled greater understanding of what is happening at the policy level to impact decisions and actions that helped to legitimate and realise FiReControl.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction: major projects, modernity and the projects' paradox

As distinctive features of modernisation, major projects combine large financial and human resources with technical innovation in temporary coalitions of firms (Winch 2008), involving public and or private sector organisations. Projects are temporary endeavours, undertaken to deliver a unique product or service (Meredith and Mantel, 2011). Projects are increasingly recognised as a versatile and flexible form of work organisation (Cicmil and Hodgson 2006), if not *the* new organisation (Weick, 1995). The term “project” has broadened through concepts such as projectification (Whittington *et al.*, 1999; Maylor *et al.*, 2006), emergence of service delivery projects (Levene, 2002), organisational change and the phenomenon of programification (Maylor *et al.*, 2006). This research is concerned specifically with public sector projects, which are often called reform projects, delivered by the UK Government to transform public services and deliver infrastructure. It is such projects, totalling in 2013 some £488bn that are amongst the most ambitious and important in the country (The Cabinet Office, 2014), to which, this research aims to contribute further understanding.

Project-based organising is now a prevalent and dominant concept occurring at every echelon of the economy, interconnecting all sectors and industries (Beck, 2009). Society's quest for mobility that knows no boundaries; a “zero-friction society” (Canzler *et al.*, 2008, p.84), has resulted in a world of flows and mobilities linking the local and the global. In the frictionless movement of people, goods, energy, information and money, infrastructure, technology and reengineering of processes play a key role. The scope of such work to build the mobility-enabling systems and facilities, such as airports, hospitals, schools, train stations, roads and the technologies that connect them is extensive (Baumann, 1998; Canzler *et al.*, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2006). As universal solutions to organisational problems (Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006), projects represent a different stage of social and economic development and major projects have become the zeitgeist of global contemporary society. Describing the virtual shrinking of distance and time through major technological projects, Baumann, (1998, p.6) called this progress the “Great War of Independence from Space” and along with the delivery teams, projects have evolved into the economic and social processes upon which the new world order now depends (Flyvbjerg, *et al.*, 2003).

Large-scale Government projects seek to regenerate urban communities, develop transport routes, improve health and well-being, prepare and respond to disasters, provide better

education, or protect against terrorism. They require the engagement and management of complex networks of stakeholders, including central and local Governments, private businesses, consultants, contractors and non-profit institutions (Winch, 2008). The organisational model used to deliver public services and fulfil public policy goals, is known as networked Government (Eggers, 2003). In public management, inter-organisational networks are recognized as fundamentally important as complex arrays of organisations work in partnership to deliver public services (Knight and Pye, 2004). The networked Government of the UK, subject to competition and market forces means public sector projects must be justified on economic grounds and fulfil the requirements of regulations and current policy aims. Typically, they are commissioned by ministerial departments and delivered through networks of public-private partnerships or by contracting out to private agencies.

Although they are ubiquitous in both the public and private sector organisations, there is a problem with large-scale projects; they are vulnerable to a “performance paradox” (Flyvbjerg *et al.*, 2003, p.3). Despite ever increasing numbers and magnitudes of major projects, the rate of failure continues to grow too (Flyvbjerg, 2003; 2007). Many suffer from extremely poor records of accomplishment in terms of completion times, cost escalations and shortfalls in projected revenues and economic benefits (Merrow *et al.*, 1988). This performance paradox applies to both private and public sector projects.

In late 2004 (during the unit of analysis for this study), the UK’s Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown emphasised the role of information technology in enabling the public sector to make the billions of pounds worth of spending savings, proposed in the Gershon Efficiency Review (HM Treasury, 2004), Brown’s talk in Parliament (Brown, HC Deb 12 July 2004 c1131), discussed how billions of pounds of investment in IT was and would continue to bring efficiencies through thousands of civil service job cuts and improved processes. However, a glance back to that period shows some of the results of that investment against a long list of public sector IT project failures. The point of this is that a similar story exists today. All of those major projects were scrutinised by the Government’s public spending watchdog and oversight agencies, such as the National Audit Office and Select Committees of the House of Commons. Back in 2004, statements made by these agencies are remarkably similar to those we still hear today; “The history of failure of major IT-enabled projects has been characterised by overspend, delays, poor performance and abandonment of projects at major cost” (NAO, 2004). Similarly, a 2004 Public Accounts Committee member, Richard Bacon, spelled out the

long list of IT based project failures that had come to the group's attention (Bacon, HC Deb 29 June, 2004 c232). The list included:

- Inland Revenue tax credit system
- Passport office modernisation
- Operation Telic, the UK's military operation in Iraq
- Wessex regional health authority
- London ambulance system
- Inland Revenue self-assessment
- Central Veterinary Laboratory database for tracking BSE
- National insurance recording system
- Immigration and nationality directorate
- Libra project for magistrates courts in England
- National probation service's information systems strategy
- Criminal Records Bureau
- GCHQ computer modernisation
- National Air Traffic Services system
- National Strategy for Police Information Systems (NSPIS)
- OASys, the joint probation service and Prison Service offender assessment System

In 2014, a decade later, the Major Projects Authority (MPA), advised that successful delivery of about one in five Government projects was in doubt and required urgent action; a total of 41 out of 199 projects, with a collective value of close to £500bn, were given a 'red' or 'amber-red' rating, compared with 31 projects the previous year (Cabinet Office, 2014). Examples of such projects are numerous. A small selection is described below.

Department of Work and Pensions' Universal Credit System

Universal Credit, the Government's flagship welfare reform, was launched in 2013 to replace six means-tested benefits and tax credits. The Department of Work and Pension (DWP), originally estimated £2.2billion for the administration costs to rollout the Universal Credit system. By August 2014 this estimate was revised upwards to £12.8billion. Following the

MPA's 2013-2014 annual assessment, the project fell into the "amber-red" category (Cabinet Office, 2014).

Department of Work and Pensions' Child Support Agency and CS2 system

CS2 was the DWP's £456m Private Finance Initiative (PFI), project to create the new IT system for the Child Support Agency (CSA). The supplier of the CS2 system signed the ten-year deal in 2000, the system was due to go live in 2001, but was delayed until 2003. The system would not meet the original 2001 specification until 2007. The system initially processed claims so slowly that it made a backlog of 30,000 new cases every quarter. Since its introduction the CSA has written off £1bn in claims and CS2 was finally axed in 2006 (Public Accounts Committee, 2007).

NHS National Programme for IT

The NHS National Programme for IT (NPfIT), commenced in 2002. It was considered the world's largest civil computer project. In 2009 it was running four years late with a budget that had escalated from £5bn to around £20bn with specifications changing continuously. In September 2011, ministers announced they would dismantle the National Programme but in an effort to salvage something from the project, said they would keep the component parts in place with separate management and accountability structures. However, in 2013 the Public Accounts Committee examined the new structures and again found a number of significant failures in the sub projects (Public Accounts Committee, 2013).

The Magistrates Courts system, Libra

The Lord Chancellor's Department decided in 1996 to procure a PFI contract for a national standard IT system called Libra. The Department received only one bid, from ICL (now called Fujitsu Services), for £146 million. ICL raised its bid by 25% after being named preferred bidder and in December 1998 the Department signed a deal with ICL for a 10.5 year contract at a price of £184 million. By October 2003, the total cost of the project was estimated at £390 million for just 8.5 years of service, rather than the original 10.5 years. At completion, costs for this PFI project had escalated to £557m (Public Accounts Committee, 2003).

2.1 Defining failure

Despite the ever-growing dilemma of project failure, attempts to establish a complete understanding of the causes seems to be a difficult task for both academic researchers and practitioners, largely because the concept of project failure is nebulous (Cicmil *et al.*, 2006). Despite their societal and economic impact, major projects are less well understood by organisation and management theory than the improved social and economic processes they seek to enable (Winch, 2008), particularly in Government reforms. There are a variety of definitions of failure, which have largely been promoted through the project management literature and organisations such as the Project Management Institute (PMI), which advocates cost, time and scope as the fundamental control triangle for successful projects. For example, in project management terms, a project may be deemed a failure if it overruns beyond an agreed end date or if it exceeds budget or does not deliver its agreed scope (c.f. Prince 2 or PMI methodology).

This research is based on a project called FiReControl, a major reform project in the English fire service. Like many projects of its kind, it was designed to implement Government policy through organisational reform, using complex IT systems. Therefore when discussing the failure of projects to deliver reform policy, we are necessarily in the realms of discussing policy failure. Policies can fail because they cannot be implemented or because they do not fulfil their intended purpose. Kerr (1976) claims that a policy is successful, simply when it does not fail; assuming that anything short of total failure is therefore successful. Whilst this may be politically controversial or sensitive, especially in reform policies, it is an important concept to underpin the thinking around this study, insofar as it highlights the criticality of asking who actually defines success and failure. From this position, other fundamental questions are raised including for example, who defines current methods of policy and project evaluation and are those methods sufficient to identify causes of that which is defined as a success or a failure? Can policies be considered successful if they are not considered outright failures or if the implementation of the delivery project ‘went well’ (Kerr, 1976)? Likewise if project delivery is disastrous and prevents policy implementation, or if delivery goes well but the policy fails to deliver its intended purpose, what are we evaluating exactly? Such questions add to the complexity of our understanding and analysis of project failure and indeed project success (Cicmil *et al.*, 2006). The overlap between failed policies and/or failed projects also muddies the waters of both defining and evaluating success and failure. Moreover, the stage at which many public projects are cancelled and labelled as failures varies between Governments and

contexts. Many projects complete that have well exceeded budgets and under-delivered on scope. This study sought to ask if we take the notion of failure for granted. Fundamentally the question is ontological; is failure (or success) an objective state of affairs or simply a matter of interpretation (McConnell, 2010)?

This research challenges current Government methods of evaluating public reform projects, that Government ministers have labelled as failures. In the quest to address the performance paradox (Flyvbjerg, 2001), there may be other places to look for causal mechanisms influencing project delivery failure, such as further back in the policy formation stages. The results of this study show that scrutinising failed project delivery by the final PAC analysis fails to account for the full story of a major reform project. Furthermore, if defining success and failure also remains misunderstood, there is scope to build on current methods of understanding failure in major public projects.

2.2 Project failure research

In the traditional policy cycle framework, in an attempt to learn lessons, evaluation takes place after the policy implementation phase (McConnell, 2010). The UK Government assures us that “evaluation examines the outturn of a policy, programme or project against what was expected, and is designed to ensure that the lessons learned are fed back into the decision-making process. This ensures Government action is continually refined to reflect what best achieves objectives and promotes the public interest” (HM Treasury, 2003, p.45).

Thus in understanding failed public sector reform policy, *ex-poste* evaluation takes place after the implementation project is either cancelled or has reached a state of completion, after any number of budget, time or scope changes or escalations. Our main sources of understanding of this stage of implementation project failure, traditionally takes a foundationalist perspective, where success and failure are generally considered objective states of reality (McConnell, 2003). As well as the limited perspectives of Government evaluations, despite the complexity of and multi-stakeholder involvement in the perceived success or failure of major projects, academic research in this area often tends towards narrow, functionalist approaches. Such approaches have built on earlier studies, which identified issues such as budget and schedule over-runs, lack of clear objectives and scope creep (Merrow *et al.*, 1988; Merrow, 2011; Scott-Young and Samson, 2008).

2.3 Escalation of commitment to failing projects

In essence, the research into projects has broadly taken two functionalist routes. The first route is called the Factor School, which has led to the development of standardised tools and methods to improve project control and efficiency (Styhre, 2006), based on statistical research of project success and failure criteria (Söderlund 2011). The Decision School in comparison tends to favour interpretative methods to describe the role of politics and decision-making in projects, and covers issues of over-optimism (Lovallo, 2003), and the reluctance to cancel failing projects (Green, *et al.*, 2003). Decision School research originates from early experimental studies of escalation of commitment, a phenomenon where otherwise rational people commit additional resources to a failing course of action (Fox and Staw 1979; Staw, 1976; Staw and Fox 1977). Such experimental studies, rooted in positivism, elicited important theories, which were combined together into a theoretical framework developed by Staw and Ross (1987), containing four major determinants of escalation of commitment: project (original commitments of the project), psychological (internal views of the project managers), social (expectations and influences of individuals or groups on the project), and organisational (hierarchical structures and cultures of the organisation). Staw and Ross (1987), prescribed actions to reduce or eliminate decision makers' tendency to escalate commitment by controlling for these factors in various ways, for example removing a sense of responsibility from project managers. This approach illustrates the narrow focus on people (agents) behaviours, as the main determinants of project failure through escalation.

The evolution of the commitment escalation field has led to alternative explanations for project failure. Escalation of commitment to a failing project can be caused more by decision dilemmas than by cavalier attitudes of throwing good money after bad (Bowen 1987). Drummond (1996; 1998), introduces the idea that in commitment escalation, people create decision rationales for themselves. In her study of the London Stock Exchange's Taurus Project, Drummond finds evidence of both decision dilemmas and social psychological factors as motivating factors in escalation (Drummond, 1996). Self-interest is identified for escalation through the elevation of individual changes over the greater interests of the project resulting in unmanageable complexity. In addition, people engage in superficial levels of due diligence decision-making, thus carrying out roles expected of them without challenge as attention is engrossed in solving the problem rather than questioning the problem itself (Drummond, 1996).

Drummond (1996, p.187) takes the escalation research into new directions, when concluding her analysis of the failed Taurus project that “Escalation begins with the establishment of a myth....persistence is political will, destructive logic characterised by due diligence, project and organisational factors combine to obscure reality, everyone carries on because that’s what some committee says we do”. Inevitably, the myths “become so deeply embedded as to be taken-for-granted, like some inviolate rule beyond individual discretion leading”, (ibid, p.76).

2.4 Future perfect strategies

Decision dilemmas are compounded by dominant myths (Drummond 1996) and are created partly through the use of future perfect strategies (Clegg, *et al.*, 2002; Pitsis, *et. al*, 2003). In future perfect strategising, the forward-looking projection of ends is combined with a visualization of the means by which that projected future may be accomplished (Weick, 1979) including shaping the decision-making process through overestimating benefits and underestimating costs (Atkin, 2012; Flyvbjerg, 2008; Flyvbjerg *et al.*, 2003; Miller and Lessard, 2001), which only serve to affirm and deepen the myths.

Future perfect strategising generally relates to functional views of costs and benefits. Reform projects that comprise new organisational configurations based on new technology systems, by their very nature lack evidence of their potential results (Georgiadou, 2003), and forward-looking projections are necessary to some degree. The idea that success is more likely if project participants share a vision underpins the future perfect strategising concept. However, research suggests (Clegg, *et al.*, 2006; Winch, 2008; Kriener and Winch, 2008) that future perfect thinking as a project management strategy necessitates constant revisiting and reinforcement of the projections, which complicates project implementation. Such research explores project delivery and the role played by future perfect strategies, which may be contributing to project failure up at the delivery stage. Their findings indicate future perfect strategies or projections are not useful in providing realistic foundations for delivering projects but may play a role in rallying political and financial support. This study is not concerned with implementation failure *per se* as it seeks to look elsewhere for other causal influences.

The idea that visioning the future to rally political and financial support (Kriener and Winch, 2008), is therefore not to be underestimated or relegated as an incidental finding when exploring

implementation failure. This study argues that it is an important place to explore the very seeds of failure.

From the literature review, questions can begin to be asked to orient the research. For example, were powerful myths (Drummond, 1996), or political imperatives used to create the vision necessary to ensure actors took part without being fully convinced that the project was practicable in economic, contractual and technical respects (Kreiner & Winch, 2008). Could such myths serve to generate commitment to the course of action, the reform? Did such myths form the antecedents to escalation of commitment once the project started to lose its way and were they accounted for by the oversight agencies seeking to learn lessons after failure? Based on these early challenges to extant literature on failed projects, the specific research questions for this study will be detailed in Section 3.3.5.

2.5 Oversight and learning lessons after project failure

The strategic policy initiatives of the UK Governments, become the complex, large-scale programmes of change, or reform, which are often driven by complex information system technologies and it is these programmes to which this study refers. These programmes are beset by delivery problems that frequently end in failure, whether through cancellation or through unmanaged or unmanageable scope creep, budget or timescale escalations, (Meredith and Mantel, 2011; Flyvbjerg *et al.*, 2003; Anderson, 2006). Lessons learned after the failure of major public projects is delivered by oversight agencies such as the National Audit Office (NAO), the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and the Major Projects Authority (MPA). In light of the continued problems around Government projects, the MPA was formed in 2011 as a partnership between the Home Office and HM Treasury and is tasked with overseeing all Government major projects. The fourth operational pillar of the MPA is its remit for lessons learned, called ‘achievements and learning’. The aim of which is to establish an innovative, electronic platform to capture and communicate lessons learned and best practice, to enable direct access to project material (Cabinet Office, 2014). However, as with other oversight agencies in Government projects, vital information can still be withheld from the process which can contribute to lack of genuine transparency.

More traditional sources of Government learning are the NAO and the PAC, the two key audit institutions of the UK Government. The NAO is a parliamentary, rather than a Government agency working alongside audit agencies of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with the

objective of generating financial savings. The NAO is responsible for the financial auditing of central Government accounts and annually produces approximately 60 Value for Money (VfM) audit reports on selected issues (Dunleavy and Britain, 2009). However, whilst apparently independent from the political process, the NAO still performs a continuous balancing act; it needs its reports to be controversial enough to remind Parliament and the public of its usefulness, but not so controversial as to cause the PAC to divide along party political lines (Roberts and Pollitt, 1994).

The main work of the all-party Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is to examine the VfM reports made by the head of the National Audit Office – the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG). PAC reviews are concerned with Government departments' economic, efficient and effective use of resources to further their policy objectives. The PAC is concerned with performance accountability and represents the highest level in a parliamentary democracy where organisations can be called to account for their performance (Jones and Jacobs, 2006). The PAC's objective is to draw lessons from past successes and failures, which can be applied to future activity either by the organisations examined or by holding to account the Government for its use of taxpayers' money. The PAC is arguably the ultimate purveyor of received wisdom in lessons learned for public projects.

However, like the NAO, the PAC has also been criticised for not examining public accounts per se, as it only considers the reports produced by the NAO, therefore narrowly focusing on the financial probity of public spending (McGee, 2002). For the public sector reform agenda, the underpinning role of the PAC is considered paradoxical (Jones & Jacobs, 2006) given that their focus is on managerialism² rather than political oversight (Gray & Jenkins, 1993). The economic bias of the PAC compromises its ability to challenge the evidence base on which policies are developed and on which projects decisions are made. The taken-for-granted assumption of the PAC is that the policy and its implementation project had the potential for success because another government process, the OGC Gateway Process has established this. The OGC Gateway examines programmes and projects at key decision points in their lifecycle to provide assurance that they can progress successfully to the next stage; the process is best practice in central civil government, the health sector, local government and Defence. By the time the PAC investigates (OGC-gateway approved) failures, the

² The Oxford Dictionary defines Managerialism as the belief in or reliance on the use of professional managers in administering or planning an activity.

assumption of the project's capacity to succeed is taken-for-granted. This assumption prevents learning in the areas of evidence-based decisions or political rhetoric and conflates learning to functional failures.

In relation to project failure, the PAC typically indicates procurement and project management inadequacies as the common conclusions for failure. Such findings support much of the functionalist project research (c.f. Anderson, 2006; Meredith and Mantell, 2011; Flyvbjerg, 2003; 2006; Merrow, 1988), that determines over optimism, future perfect strategizing, or poor adherence to standards as causes of failure. Findings from Government inquiries are also predominantly deterministic using conventional lessons learned approaches to describe event level observations. Yet it is the taken-for-granted assumptions implicit in public inquiry methods that are often not acknowledged. Evaluation reports of public projects from the PAC, NAO and more recently the MPA indicate they are fundamentally political and primarily concerned with accountability for public resources used and the delivery mechanisms employed (Klecun *et al.*, 2014). The methods used have been criticised for being entrenched in the realms of economics and focusing on cost-benefit analysis or financial sustainability, and based on methods “rooted in objectivist assumptions” (Friedman and Wyatt, 2006, p.32). They are “built on a comparison of “outcome variables” across contexts or time, assessing performance by pre-established metrics, or focusing on a narrow range of anticipated effects” (Klecun, *et al.*, 2014, p.148).

Ontologically, such methods consider failure as an objective fact, and seek to determine definitive causes of failure using positivist frameworks of performance and measurement against identifiable standards. Consequently another question emerges to guide the focus of this research; does there exist a phenomenon of project failure (or an aspect of it) that is independent of our knowledge of it, which current project evaluation methods cannot reveal but which may help us to understand more about Government project failure?

2.5 Summary of project research perspective

In problematising public sector project failure research, this study challenges both the ideological and field assumptions that are made by Government oversight agencies and the procedures by which they deliver lessons learned after projects fail. It also seeks to challenge the prominent positivist paradigm assumptions of such inquiries and other projects' research that look to the same places for singular explanations of the causes of failure.

The issues arising from our extant sources of understanding of reform project failure prompts the following challenges;

- 1] That failure is an objective state of reality that exists,
- 2] That causes of failure can only be found within the boundary of the project itself, and
- 3] That project-related people (agents) are usually to blame.

Functional approaches have revealed much in terms of the numerous determinants of project implementation failure, yet true and definitive causes remain elusive. At the heart of the issue is an understanding of and challenge of the term ‘failure’. This research will advocate the concept that failure is not itself an absolute truth, but rather a concept of understanding that is reached when support is withdrawn (Drummond and Hodgson, 2003). The study looks beyond the traditional spheres of inquiry, such as functional failures during implementation or the escalation of commitment during project delivery. Instead it will bound its unit of analysis towards the antecedents of failure, towards the complex interplay of the people, the institutions and environments that pre-exist the reform project, where reform ideas are generated and legitimated.

2.7 Broad questions arising from the reform projects literature

- Do projects fail only because delivery agents underperform through bad management practice or over estimating outcomes?
- Are powerful myths (perhaps described as political imperatives), used to create the vision that secures resources and commitment for projects, despite contrary evidence?
- How do ideas emerge and develop into projects?
- What is project failure?
- Does project failure exist independent of our knowledge of it, and which current project evaluation methods cannot truly reveal?

These guiding questions helped to shape the research questions which are stated in Section 3.3.5.

2.8 THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.8.0 Introduction

The research explores the early political stages before the delivery project begins, where ideas are formed, politicised, legitimated and transformed into strategic reform policy. Exploring the antecedents of escalation of commitment and delivery failure requires the examination of how early reform ideas are framed and rationalised into policy. Building support to gain policy approval and to secure public resources for implementation, locates the research within the fields of legitimacy, institutionalism and public management. Therefore, the first conceptual lens of **institutional theory** and the key conceptual component of legitimacy will be used to explore the build-up to the approval of a major reform project.

Challenging both the traditional, foundationalist, positivist approaches (which evaluate project failure as an indisputable fact), as well socially constructivist views (which suggest failure is a matter of interpretation), an argument is advocated that straddles both standpoints, which emphasises the very political nature of policy and project failure (McConnell, 2003).

An analytic lens has been chosen, which has its foundations in **social theory** to explore the political nature of project failure. Social theory is concerned with the fundamental assumptions of social inquiry that questions the nature of human agency and its relationship to social and cultural structures (Wendt, 1999). The variant of social theory that better suits the analytic requirements of this research is **realist social theory**. As the analytic framework to the study, realist social theory will be discussed in Section 2.8.

Realist social theory represents Archer's (1995), contribution to the field and is based on the overarching philosophy of **critical realism**, which informed the methodology of this research. Critical realism is discussed in Section 3.1.4.

The realist social theory approach can illuminate what is partly unobservable (Bhaskar, 1978). In the realm of reform politics, where decisions and actions take place in the rooms and halls of Westminster, there are unobservable structures that exert influence on actors and vice versa. Through these relations, legitimacy builds to enable or constrain action. In the search for understanding and explanation of how ideas are legitimated and transformed into policies and scoped into delivery projects, the research explores how and by what power, reform policies are framed as rational programmes of change, who stands to gain or lose by the process and whether it is desirable. This value and power focus leads the research towards the concept of

phronesis as described in Aristotle's, *Nicomachean Ethics* (trans. Irwin, 1999). The phronetic aims of the research are discussed in Chapter 3.

2.8.1 Institutional theory: Towards answering the question, *what is there?*

The following section provides the theoretical framework and an examination of the literature related to institutional theory, legitimacy, rhetoric and new public management. I will first introduce institutional theory and its philosophical evolutions. I will then discuss and position legitimacy as a central imperative of the theory. DiMaggio & Powell (1991) refer to the 'legitimacy imperative' of institutional theory describing legitimacy as a source of inertia in organisations to develop and maintain the practices that align specifically with appropriate organisational behaviour as per the social myths that prevail. The rationale for discussing legitimacy in the context of institutional theory is to establish the conceptual links to other concepts that are relevant to this study of a Government reform project, such as rhetoric and new public management (NPM). Rhetoric can be strategically deployed to create legitimacy (build myth), and NPM (Hood, 1991), as a form of institutional legitimacy can both influence and be influenced by actors in the field. These concepts form parts of the theory lens for the research.

Institutional Theory has evolved through many research perspectives and has become a dominant approach to understanding organisations. The modern foundations were established by the works of key institutional researchers, such as Zucker (1977), DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Meyer and Rowan (1977). Their perspectives portrayed organisations as "agentic actors responding to situational circumstances...influenced by their institutional context, i.e. by widespread social understandings (rational myths)" that define what it means to be rational (Greenwood *et al.*, 2008, p.3). By the 1980s, a defining theme of institutionalism had been established; that organisations use "particular arrangements that defy rational explanations" (ibid, p.31) that are explained by Institutional Theory, which emphasizes the criticality of shared and taken-for-granted social values and ideas (Greenwood *et al.*, 2008). This view is based on claims that organisations can be described as dramatic enactments of rationalised myths based on the widespread norms of modern societies. Further, these formal organisational structures are influenced by institutional context that has more to do with social values and the rules or myths that abound, than with the demands of the work itself (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

A key assumption of the early institutional theory literature is that by conforming to institutional norms, organisations gain legitimacy and improve their prospects of survival (Powell 1991). The work of Meyer and Rowan (1977), features legitimacy as a key concept, suggesting it can protect an organisation from external pressures such as scrutiny or challenges to its conduct. Conforming to rationalised myths or societal expectations about what constitutes a proper organisation results in another phenomena; institutional isomorphism (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) focused on the idea that organisations converge upon the same response to their institutional environments and sought to understand this homogeneity of organisational forms. Their seminal work put forward early explanations for isomorphism, where either through imitation or independent development under similar constraints, organisations share similarity of the processes or structures. Explanations include the structuration of organisational fields, suggesting “powerful forces emerge that lead them (organisations) to become more similar to one another” (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, p.148). Becoming isomorphic with one’s institutional context “signals social fitness and gains legitimacy in the eyes of critical constituents” (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006, p.4), giving the appearance of being rational (Scott, 1983). Finding that isomorphism was facilitated by the diffusion of ideas, practices and knowledge about prescribed organisational structures among other organisations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), led to a significant contribution to the field. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) put forward three diffusion mechanisms by which organisations come to mimic each other; coercive (organisations are forced to change by external forces), normative (where professional standards influence changes in organisations) and mimetic isomorphism (when organisations imitate each other’s structures or processes in the belief they are beneficial).

Once isomorphism became apparent it led to research about why and how organisations adopt these processes. From an organisation’s perspective, conforming to institutional rules might not always match rational business aims and may in fact conflict with business requirements in respect of technical efficiency (Boxenbaum and Jonsson, 2008). To address this paradox, organisations end up decoupling their practice from their structure to enable them to achieve legitimacy which ensures survival, whilst remaining efficient or consistent (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). The phenomena of organisational decoupling was taken up by researchers such as Brunsson (1989), to explore public sector management and reforms, where the goal of modernisation has little effect on operational practice, and is explored further in Section 2.7

Returning to the evolution of institutional theory and the concept of isomorphism, the lack of theorisation outside of the public sector field and confusion around the very concept of isomorphism itself led to ambiguities in the theory (Fombrun 1989). If isomorphism is about the relationship between an organisation and its institutional context, questions began to be asked about why all organisations do not respond to their relative institutional forces in the same way. Meyer and Rowan had already identified that “institutional myths differ in [their] completeness” (1977, p.354), which suggested that choice and strategy could be used towards interpreting them. Furthermore, the realisation that organisations and groups competing for power may or may not exploit the legitimating effect of isomorphism to varying degrees highlighted the fact that they will not all align with their institutional contexts in the same way.

Expanding the scope of institutional theory, organisational researchers began to embrace the ideas that DiMaggio and Powell (1988) had raised in relation to agency. (c.f. Eisenhardt, 1988; Dacin et al., 2002; Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006). Agency theory suggests that organisations (actors) are not entirely at the mercy of institutional norms (Eisenhardt, 1988; Carstensen, 2011), otherwise how were new organisational forms created and legitimated and by whom, and with what power? DiMaggio (1988), had called for the influences of agency to be considered as organisational responses to their institutional contexts and suggested agency may be more intentional than many had acknowledged. Furthermore, strategic choice may be involved and contingent on the environmental context. Prior to this perspective, institutional theory had fallen short in accounting for the role of actors (organisations) in promoting their institutional context through legitimating activities, implying that “institutional contexts were ‘out there’, as constraints on an organisation rather than as something with which the organisation interacts and constructs” (Greenwood *et al.*, 2008, p.13). It was from here that the notion of *intentionally* promoting institutional contexts evolved and the concept of legitimacy re-emerged, which had previously been recognised as an institutional phenomenon (Meyer and Scott 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977, Weber 1978).

The previous discussion outlines the key concepts that have defined institutional theory as it emerged through organisational studies. In essence these defining concepts suggest that organisational practices and structures are shaped by socially constructed rules or beliefs that are influenced by the wider context. When organisations conform to institutional norms, they do so to gain legitimacy. Prevailing norms pressurise organisations such that they become isomorphic with others in their field to maintain their legitimacy and thus their survival (DiMaggio and Powell, 1988; Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006).

2.7.2 Legitimacy

As a central theme in organisational institutionalism, the work of Meyer and Scott (1983), highlighted the significance of legitimacy in institutional theory, describing it in terms of an explanatory concept relating to the stage at which no questions can be raised about an organisation. A single definition that fully captures the conceptual diversity of legitimacy is difficult to find but it can broadly be defined as a generalised perception that within a socially constructed set of norms, values and beliefs, particular actions are perceived as desirable, proper or appropriate (Suchman, 1995). Influence cannot easily be exerted by solely possessing and using power. It is legitimacy that leads people to believe that the entity is appropriate, proper, and just (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). It enables people to feel that they ought to defer to decisions and rules, and that they can follow them voluntarily out of obligation rather than out of fear of punishment or anticipation of reward (Tyler, 2006). Thus legitimacy is a broadly applied concept and can be ascribed (or denied), (Patty and Penn, 2013), to “an act, a rule, a procedure, a routine, a distribution, a position, a group or team, a group’s status structure, teamwork, a system of positions, an authority structure, an organization, organizational symbols, an organizations form, practices, services, programs, a regime, a system of power, and a system of inequality (to name a few)” (Johnson, 2004, p.17). Legitimacy is essential for the survival of an organisation (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975) as it sets boundaries, thereby limiting what people may or may not do and it shapes perceptions, determines agendas and informs decisions (Berger and Luckmann, 1991).

Suchman (1995), differentiates between concepts of legitimacy; institutional legitimacy and strategic legitimacy. The institutional perspective of legitimacy is viewed as a set of norms, values and beliefs which embed practices, enable shared meanings, and convey expectations and values (Colyvas and Powell, 2006). This institutional perspective of legitimacy relates to the cognitive process by which an entity becomes embedded in norms through taken-for-granted assumptions that effects collective action (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005; Hannah and Carroll, 1992).

Strategic legitimacy in comparison is gained through intentional pursuit of organisational goals (Suchman, 1995). The theories of institutional and strategic legitimacy support two key concepts in the context of this research. The first concept is rhetoric; a source of strategic legitimacy deployed to achieve organisational goals by the New Labour administration in the context of this research. The second concept is New Public Management, which at the time of the FiReControl project was the dominant institutional framework for public sector governance

in UK that could legitimate, and render taken-for-granted, the talk and actions of political actors in power. The discussion then moves to discuss these sources of legitimacy, common to the early stages of reform projects, in the context of social theory and the complex interplay between structures, cultures and agency. Based on Archer's (1995), concepts of analytic dualism and morphogenetic cycles (c.f. Section 2.8), the conceptual framework presents the backdrop to the data analysis, where structures, cultures and agency will be explored to tease out how actions can be both influenced by, and influential to, the process of acquiring or strategically deploying legitimacy.

2.7.3 Strategic legitimacy, discourse and rhetoric

Fundamental to strategic legitimacy is understanding language, specifically, "how meanings of discourse are shared and processed for decisions and how they give meaning to actions" (Phillips et al., 2004, p. 637). Phillips et al., (2004), argue that it is not actions *per se* that define institutions but rather, they are constituted through discourse and the texts that describe and communicate those actions, postulating that institutions can be understood as products of the discursive activity that influence action.

Legitimacy and legitimation are conceptually close to institutionalization (Brinkerhoff, 2005) and there is a fundamental relationship between institutions and language from which organisational meanings are sustained (Foucault, 1972). The wider influences of language and discourse enhance the traditional scope of institutional theory, which was otherwise concerned with only organizational practice. Discourse is the structured collections of meaningful texts (Parker, 1992), and through their analysis we can learn more about institutionalization to move the concept of institution beyond just action, to discourse. Discourse affects action through the production of institutions; social constructions that embody sets of sanctions which make certain viewpoints dominant and thus make contradictory actions problematic (Fairclough, 2005; Fleetwood, 2008). The underlying assumptions of institutions, which are often unexamined, are deeply held, and form a framework within which reasoning takes place (Horn, 1983, p.1).

Major projects can be viewed as new organisational forms (Weick, 2005), and those who are affected will seek to attach or deny legitimacy to the new project and what it promises. Suddaby and Greenwood (2005), advance the three tenets of institutional research in explaining the emergence of a new organisational form. Firstly, a new organisational form emerges via a growing knowledge of legitimacy, as alternative forms are rejected by actors, followed

(secondly), by shifts in the underlying logic that underpins their frameworks for reason and belief. Finally, such shifts are enabled through strategic use of the persuasive language of *rhetoric*. While discourse views language as a form of social practice, rhetoric restricts its focus to explicitly interest-laden discourse and enables a situational focus on how actors seek to achieve change (Fairclough, 2005).

Rhetoric does not feature heavily in the political literature (Krebs and Jackson, 2007). The dynamics and outcomes are rarely proved with theoretical frameworks and “rhetoric *can* play a role in explaining outcomes and those holding the reins of power can and must deploy it” (ibid, p.38). Gaining and keeping power relies as much on legitimacy as it does on physical coercion and legitimacy can only be established through rhetorical action (Wolf, 2006). The framing of political activity (through rhetoric) is as important to furthering political agendas harnessing physical resources towards those aims and as such should be explored in political analysis (Krebs and Jackson, 2007).

“Public sector organisations are prone to make the mistake of supposing that organisational statements and decisions agree with organisational actions’ (Brunsson, 1989, p.231). This statement suggests there is more talk than action (Pollitt, 2001), explained in terms of what are essentially normal organisational and political procedures. In other words, people are simply doing what they do; behaving rationally within their own frames of reference, following their institutional logics or the master principles (Greenwood *et al.*, 2008), to guide them on how to carry out their work.

Talk can have a life of its own, and talk and decisions are tools used in politics to win legitimacy (Brunsson, 1989). In major public projects, for example, legitimacy begins at a political ideological level, where a project is legitimated into existence by the macro, context-laden myth (Drummond, 1996), and rhetoric that successfully secure resources for that project over others. The project survives for as long as it can command the necessary social support and is influenced in this survival challenge by multiple legitimating forces. Brunsson (1989), distinguishes between talk, decision and actions, to which Pollitt (2001), adds ‘results’, asserting that in public administration even determined implementations (actions) do not necessarily lead to uniform or expected results. It is especially the case for political organisations, “since most of the ‘production’ of ministerial departments consists of talk, statements and decisions, rather than concrete goods, services or, more atomistically, actions” (Pollitt, 2001, p.936). Whilst talk and decisions are commonplace in politics, there isn’t always

the follow-up action. However, the decision itself is useful to achieve and maintain legitimacy. Talk and decisions indicate the way forward, the frames of thinking, they allocate responsibility whether implicitly or explicitly and they essentially affect activity in a direction even if the intended outcome is not completed or delivered. It is the framing of activity, the direction of travel, the allocation of resources towards an ideal, the ‘movement’ that people can get behind and those who oppose can also look busy opposing. Whether actions take place is sometimes secondary.

2.7.4 Institutional legitimacy and new public management

This research is located within the sphere of public sector reform projects. The public sector is the part of national economy providing basic goods or services that are either not, or cannot be, provided by the private sector. It consists of national and local Governments and the network of associated agencies and bodies. How the sector is managed will be influenced by the economic methods and models of the Government in power (Ironside and Seifert, 2004). The rise and fall of different schools of economics is related to shifts in the balance of political, social and economic power and economic theories are independent of each other, they do not supersede each other (Skidelsky, 2010). Thus the economic methods of Maynard Keynes, for example, whose welfare solutions were devised in the 1930s after the Great Depression (whereby, increased Government spending and deficits were intended to increase demand in the economy for more production, causing producers to increase supply to meet that demand, hiring more workers and reducing unemployment in the process, (Seddon, 2008), still have followers today. Keynesian economics re-emerged across the world as potential recovery solutions following the 2008 crash, with USA, China and the UK, for example increasing Government spending to kick start the economy (Rafiq, 2008).

European centre-left Governments arguably regard Keynesianism and social democracy (which, advocates economic and social interventions to promote social justice within the framework of a capitalist economy (Giddens, 2013), with derision (Ironside and Seifert, 2004). Comments by ex-Conservative Secretary of State, Michael Heseltine; “by 1979 local Government had become a barely controllable free-wheeling employment machine, which, for year after year had been run largely for the benefit of the machine-minders” (Heseltine, 1987, p.43), backed up by scholars (e.g. Dunleavy, 2006), normed such views of inefficiency at the hands of bureaucrats.

The perspective of state inefficiency favours the opinion that the relatively poor performance of public sector organisations is due to the lack of the competition machinery of private sector firms. In the neo-classical model of the pursuit of profit, this notion is the motor that drives increases in efficiency, effectiveness, and economy in private companies (Ironside and Seifert, 2004). Centre-left Governments have adopted the neo-liberal alternative to Keynesianism or social democracy, embracing the New Right's 'public choice' theories. This approach rejects socialist economic ideology, which involves welfare state provisions, collective bargaining arrangements and regulation of the economy in the general interest and redistribution of wealth (Heywood, 2012). Institutional logics are systems of socially constructed cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values, and beliefs, by which organizations provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and space, and reproduce experiences (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). Advocating public choice theories, the institutional logic of neo-liberals favours involvement of private firms in the delivery of public services, asserting that it results in the best allocation and delivery of services. The practical application of the public choice ideals to public service became known as New Public Management (Hood, 1991).

New Public Management (NPM), is an overarching term denoting the administrative reforms that have been implemented across many countries' public sectors over the last 25 years (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). The early growth of NPM was heavily influenced by the business-like attitudes to Government of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, which resulted in a set of recipes for public sector reform. By the early 1990s this became known as NPM or (in the US) Re-inventing Government (Hood, 1991). The consultants, Du Gay, Osborne and Gaebler, (1993), advisors to the US Government, spoke of 'entrepreneurial Government' and of global trends in public sector reforms. Coupled with claims by ministers that the UK was at the forefront of a global movement and supported by research publications, the general consensus was that most of the developed world was implementing policies of NPM. NPM involved developing performance management, introducing competition, offering quality and choice to citizens, and shifting Government roles from operations to strategy. However, it was argued that in retrospect, the whole of the world was not following the same path (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011), yet "it remains true that NPM ideas spread widely, and are often still seen as the most obvious route to modernization" (Pollitt and Dan, 2011, p.5).

Since 2003, the post-NPM landscape has been described variously as the 'new public governance' (Osborne, 2006), 'digital-era governance' (Dunleavy *et al.*, 2006) and the 'neo-Weberian state' (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). However, the reform objectives of these various

versions of NPM policies have all had similar goals: “to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the public sector; to enhance the responsiveness of public agencies to their clients and customers; to reduce public expenditure; and to improve managerial accountability” (Lægreid 2011, p.2). Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were the first leaders to introduce the ideas of NPM around 1979/80 and Australia and New Zealand soon followed throughout the 1980s. NPM reforms have spread throughout the world through the forces of globalisation and particularly where countries have had influence through Commonwealth connections and international organisation networks (Lægreid, 2011).

Public records are steeped in the ministerial visionary rhetoric of NPM (Pollitt, 2001). New Labour advocated and promoted themes of modernisation, partnership and innovation (Clarke at al., 2000). When such talk wins legitimacy and support, a new language emerges, and the new club of people who speak this language hold the power (Pollitt, 2001). In reform, ‘truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements (Foucault, 1980). NPM is a reform system, invariably influenced and tweaked by the high politics of the time, where the adversarial conduct of politicians, institutional structures and ideological politics shapes the behaviour of decision-makers inside Government (Moran, 2001), but in essence the ideologies are geared towards objectives of efficiency and accountability. It is with these objectives that public reform projects can be conceived based on ideologies that are unproven, yet without evidence of success, why do policies such as the Private Finance Initiative, (PFI), regionalisation and outsourcing continue? Functionalist approaches say that if there is increased take-up then they must be more efficient solutions, and so the cycle of adoption continues (Wise, 2002). Whilst the pursuit of efficiency can remain the guiding purpose, if there is more talk of achieving efficiency than seeing it in action, then perhaps this has just come to be expected of political organisations (Pollitt, 2001).

“Studies of organisational and political change routinely point to findings that are hard to square with either rational actor or functionalist accounts, administrators and politicians champion programmes that are established but not implemented, managers gather information assiduously but fail to analyse it; experts are hired not for advice but to signal legitimacy” (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, p.3)

Pollitt (2001), highlights the deterministic, functionalist mind-set at the root of the general conviction that there is global convergence towards reforming the public sector for smarter,

more efficient working. The taken-for-granted causal link between the popularity of such change programmes as an indicator of their success, and justification to continue in the same direction has been challenged (Pollitt, 2001, 2011; Goldfinch and Wallis, 2010; Polidano, 2001). These critics suggest the functionalist, deterministic tendency to explain the similarity of the pursuit of efficiency through reform is based on a strong surviving brand of contingency. Such challengers contend that functionalist, received notions of global convergence lead to the taken-for-granted behaviour of Governments to be seen to be doing something under the remit of NPM. There is still, however, a paucity of evidence for efficiency gains achieved through the innovations of NPM (Goldfinch & Wallis, 2010). Major reform projects might contribute towards the aim of *doing something* in line with taken-for-grantedness that legitimates public management agendas. There is little evidence of efficiency for the projects that do complete, and if there is any efficiency gained in one sector it does not follow this will be the case in every sector, (Goldfinch & Wallis, 2010; Polidano, 2001; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 1995; Pollitt, 2001).

Thus if NPM policies lack evidence of capacity to deliver, there must be an alternative explanation for the spread of public sector reforms that claim to deliver efficiency. Pollitt (2001), suggests the answer is to be found in new institutionalism, whereby the copying of organisational forms (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) is less to do with improving performance through efficiency and more to do with, as previously discussed, legitimacy. Earlier in this chapter, legitimacy was described in the context of institutionalism and the two categories, strategic (Suchman, 1995), and institutional (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Deephouse, 1996), that frame legitimacy in relation to this research. Rhetoric was linked to strategic legitimacy (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005) and NPM to institutional legitimacy (Pollitt, 2001), or isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

Returning to the three categories of isomorphism introduced earlier, coercive, mimetic and normative (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), a Government agency exhibiting coercive isomorphism can exert power to force institutional reform over the lower tiers of Government who acquiesce in exchange for receiving assistance associated with the reform (Pollitt, 2001). As an example, in the case of FiReControl, Chief Fire Officers were not explicitly instructed to regionalise and retained the right to reject transferring their control room to a regional, limited company facility. However, to do so would have left them out of the significant

technological investment and the additional New Burdens³ funding that was associated with the reform. Another example of such a reform still around in the early New Labour years was the Conservative party's policy of Compulsory Competitive Tendering, which resulted in EU financial assistance for those who implemented the policy.

When organisations find themselves in conditions of significant uncertainty, particularly new organisations or new groups in power, for example, following Government changes, mimetic isomorphism can occur (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). In these situations, the safest option is to copy what appears to be existing formulae already considered modern or successful, such as public sector reform (Pollitt 2001). As with legitimacy, the strategy to play it safe may be intentional and strategic, or it may be something that occurs naturally because of exposure to institutional structures and cultures (Suchman, 1995; Archer, 1995). The proliferation of NPM policies and their apparent convergence across organisations and countries may be better explained by isomorphism and not necessarily the result of global economic pressures, or gains in efficiency or effectiveness (Goldfinch and Wallis, 2010; Pollitt, 2001, Common, 1998). Supporting evidence is found in an extensive Europe-wide meta-analysis research programme, which assessed the impact of 520 NPM reforms (Pollitt and Dan, 2011). Findings suggest that the claims which NPM policies make towards achieving efficiency remain common, yet outputs and outcomes are still insufficiently evidenced. The (rarely defined) use of terms efficiency, productivity or quality and the lack of data or financial evidence that supports claims (which say systems work faster or better and activities have improved) “are especially salient” (ibid, p. 32). Figure 1. summarises the key theoretical concepts for the study.

³ Governments aim to limit pressure on council tax bills through the ‘new burdens doctrine’. This requires all Whitehall departments to justify and fund any new duties, powers, targets and other bureaucratic burdens placed on local authorities (including parishes, police and fire and rescue authorities) by central Government, New burdens doctrine (Department for Communities & Local Government, 2011).

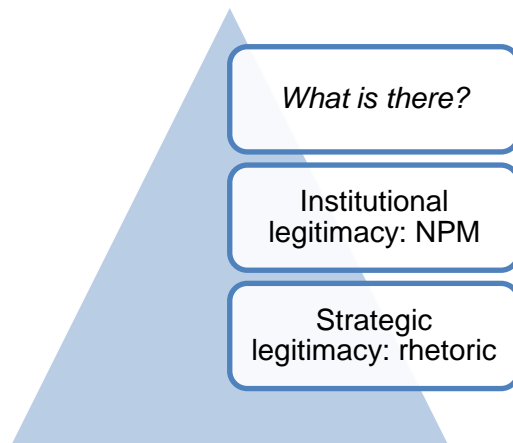


Figure.1 Theoretical concepts for the research

2.8 Realist Social Theory: Towards answering the question: *How should we study it?*

The theoretical lens of legitimacy was introduced to help answer the question '*what is there?*' Answering the next question; '*how should we study it?*' is also conceptually fundamental to the aims of the research, in its quest to ask different questions of reform project failure. Contextualised against the project management literature that highlighted the projects' paradox and the relative myopia of learning lessons, the conceptual framework aims to offer both theoretical *and* analytic direction towards achieving a second order approach. The aim of the second order approach is to look outside of the taken-for-granted domains of inquiry and ask different questions.

The analytic lens is discussed here and not in Chapter 3 (Methodology), for a specific reason. Reform politics take place in an unobservable realm. As researchers, we cannot easily access the places where political talk and decisions are made, especially if the threads of discourse reach back through years of political administrations. An analytic approach is therefore advocated to help to recreate the contextual components of these unobservable realms to reveal hidden mechanisms that may be influencing discourse and behaviour, which ultimately build legitimacy for decisions and actions. Thus, using an analytic lens to challenge more traditional ontological views and to offer a different viewpoint to project failure is crucial to the research aims. The following section describes that analytic theory lens and is located here in Chapter 2 as part of the overall conceptual framework for the research. The over-arching philosophy and methods used to operationalise the analytic lens will be described in Chapter 3.

2.9.0 An introduction to structure and agency

The ontological focus of this research aims to contribute to the more critical debates around projects and project failure (Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006; Flyvbjerg, 2001). In searching for causal influences and asking what is there and how should we study introduces the relevance of social theory and the debate over the primacy of **structure or agency** in shaping human behaviour. The key question is an issue of socialisation against autonomy in determining whether an individual acts as a free agent or in a manner dictated by social structure (Barker, 2003). For the purpose of this introduction, structure may be briefly defined as the recurrent patterned arrangements that influence or limit the choices and opportunities available, and agency as the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices (ibid).

Describing the linguistic/cultural turn in organisations research, Reed (2005), identifies the typical position taken by management research, based on ontologies and epistemologies that take for granted the existence of organisations as material entities that are ‘out there’. This view privileges structure over the cultural processes and discursive practices, through which organisational structures are created and maintained and accords with a similar objectification of projects and their failure. Projects do not exist, ready-made for us to scrutinise and classify but are constituted instead by the actions of independent actors (Weick, 1969). However, the taken-for-granted discourse of influential organisations, such as the Project Management Institute (PMI) and its Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) management principles or even the Public Accounts Committee, labelling a variety of co-ordinated and time-limited undertakings as ‘projects’ (Pakendorf, 1995) leads to and maintains their reification (Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006). Attempts to discover the true nature of projects from this perspective serves instead to further their reification (ibid).

Juxtaposing this view is the radical social constructionist position of researchers who insist organisations are “discursive constructions and cultural forms that have no ontological status or epistemological significance beyond their textually created and mediated existence” (Reed, 2005, p.1622). Social constructionists also face issues that to critics are as limiting as those of the empiricist positivists who objectively seek universality, in that organisations are reduced to discourse, limited by language, limiting what can be said and what can be known about it. The organisation has no autonomous, stable or structural status outside the text that constitutes it; “The notion of structure is illusory, representing only an ideological practice”, (Linstead, 2001, pp. 4–5; in Reed, 2005, p.1622)

In relation to the concept of projectification of society (Lundin and Soderholm, 1998; Mayor *et al.*, 2006), the roles of structure and agency and their relationship to organisational behaviour, must encompass project organisations. Social constructionists dismiss the role of structure and prioritise the primacy of the individual, of agency, of conduct, asserting that the study of society must focus on how individuals construct it (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Alvesson (2009, p.36), invites us to explore this apparently self-evident notion that social constructionists have continued to take for granted, asking “How do we know, for example, that the individual is not secondary and that overarching structures are, in fact the primary constructors – or rather creators – of individuals in the first place?” Alvesson lists several examples of approaches where individuals do not have primacy, including Fuchs’ (2001), theory of how individuals and

individuality are ‘constructed’ by networks, or, how for postmodernists and poststructuralists, texts or discourses create individuals, where text/discourse is primary.

Vandenberghe (2009), suggests the very situation of understanding is primary, and the individual is a result of this. A major criticism of social constructionism and one that is advocated by this research approach is that if reality is a social construction, then the only thing worth investigating is how the construction is carried out (Alvesson, 2009). Much social constructionist research tends not to go beyond the construction once it is identified, except perhaps to “criticize, change, or destroy some X that they dislike in the established order of things” (Hacking, 1999, p.7). It generally lacks any further inquiry of the construction, such as the reasons why people construct society in the way they do and how those constructions function as patterns of social reality, once they have been constructed (Alvesson, 2009). Alvesson, (2009, p.37) contradicts received notions of knowledge as being theory-laden and neglects the role of theories in research leading to “anti-theoretical tendencies, descriptivism and to a reduction to the individual level of analysis”.

Such an approach falls short of furthering our understanding of the phenomena and indeed of aspiring to any phronetic research goals that may be aimed at social commentary or social action, or, praxis (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Alvesson, (2009) also draws to our attention the second major concern for the social constructivism ontology; its fundamental objections to essentialism, or to the concept that phenomena have immutable core of properties, social constructivism would ask, how could there be something ‘out there’ if everything is constructed? The construction process itself is mystically ongoing and perpetual, and it has “obvious characteristics of a social constructionist ‘essence’, an inherent, unchangeable, constant property of our reality” (Alvesson, 2009, p.38). Whilst social constructivism has its merits and accords in places with this research aim to explore hidden meaning, it typically looks to agency, where the individual has primacy in the construction of reality (Berger and Luckman, 1995). This study looks for and goes beyond just hidden meaning to explore structural, cultural, *and* agential influences. Alvesson (2009), invites us to ask how we know that the individual is not the creation of some overarching structure, and could they not have primacy in the construction of reality? Thus, whilst the research opposes positivism as a paradigm suitable to illuminate that which is revealed or concealed by legitimating devices, and what causal mechanisms trigger legitimacy, likewise the confusions of social constructivism as an anti-realist approach also fall short. Social constructivist perspectives can be “self-destructive in

that they fail to acknowledge the fact that if everything is a social construction, including the researchers finding, it gives no reason for us to believe in it” (ibid, p38).

2.9.1 Realist social theory and Archer’s (1995) morphogenetic approach

Reform politics take place in the relatively unobservable realm of Government chambers over space and timeframes and sometimes different political administrations that are not always clearly or fully represented by the final delivery project evaluations. Social theory was considered a useful starting point from which to explore the reform politics of FiReControl because it provides a conceptual and analytic framework to explore the powerful groups who shape society and who supply us with methods to use to see it with. Social theory allows us to challenge the foundational assumptions and beliefs buried in taken-for-granted world generated by power groups (Rossides, 1998). However, in problematizing the extant methods of evaluating failed projects, the tendency to blame actors or agents (as in PAC evaluations); social theory alone was deemed insufficient. Social theory advocates the idea that society consists of parts and people, the social and the individual, structures and agents, or the micro and the macro. However, *realist* social theory asserts that neither component (parts/people or macro/micro) is irreducible to the other another and each is analytically separable from the other (Archer, 1995). Expanding social theory, Archer (1995), introduced the term, ‘elisionism’ as a philosophical standpoint, which assumes that the social and the individual cannot be separated. From this position, society or social reality is stratified (Bhaskar, 1975;1978), but the macro (social) and micro (individual) levels are not exclusive to any stratum of reality (Archer, 1995). Each stratum has influential powers that are irreducible to those of its components. What justifies the differentiation of strata is the existence of **emergent properties** (Archer, 1995; 1996) from the specific combination of components therein and the particular interactions of parts and people. Archer furthered the critical realism⁴ philosophy of Roy Bhaskar and based on her concept of elisionism, that the social and the individual cannot be separated, she developed the principle called **analytic dualism**.

2.9.2 Analytic dualism

Analytical dualism acknowledges the differences between structure and agency and the unique powers that each possesses and is based on two propositions:

⁴ The philosophy of critical realism will be discussed in Chapter 5.

- (i) That structure necessarily pre-dates the action(s) leading to its reproduction or transformation.
- (ii) That structural change (transformation) necessarily post-dates the action sequences, which gave rise to it (Archer, 1995).

Analytic dualism is a method that recognises that the entities of social life, the "parts and people", are "analytically separable" (Archer, 1996, p.xvi). The parts, refers to structure and culture. Archer (1996) was suggesting the central problem of structure and agency has been considered the basic issue in modern social theory and that in its centrality has overshadowed the problem of *culture* and agency. This is despite as Archer argues the substantive difference between structural and cultural domains and their relative autonomy from one another (ibid, p. vi). The substantive differences between structures and culture need to be captured otherwise these would simply be "clamped together in a conceptual vice, doing violence to our subject matter by eliding the material and the ideational aspects of social life", (ibid, p.vi). If we elide the material (structure), ideational (culture) and agential (agency) aspects of lived organisational reality, how for example, are we to understand the arguments around Government policy or the corporate strategy to develop, maintain or change the direction of an organisation? (Willmott, 2000).

The dangers of entangling structure and culture or for example viewing social structure as objective, material, observable and measurable, while culture as perhaps hidden, subjective and requiring interpretation can lead to conceptual confusion (Hays, 1994). Not only do they create misleading interpretations of these crucial concepts "structure is treated as the concept with the muscle, while agency and culture become its weak-kneed younger cousins" (ibid, p.58). In realist social theory, Archer (1995), urges research about social agents and structures to be cognisant of the relative autonomy of structure and culture to enable us to understand social life as the interplay between interests and ideas concerning a social reality consisting of three elements;

- Culture – the ideational aspects of social life such as values, beliefs, theories
- Structure – the material aspects of social life such as resources, positions, roles
- Agency – the human aspect of social life, that is, who is doing what to whom.

The complexity of the relationship between structure, culture and agency remains indefinite unless the interplay between them is unravelled over time to specify the where, when, who and

how (Archer, 1995; 1996; Willmott, 2000). Social research should determine the ongoing interconnections between systems of meaning and systems of social relations, which aims to recognise that these systems are “empirically connected but analytically distinct, with an underlying logic and dynamics of their own” (Hays, 1994, p. 71).

The key elements of the social system are now discussed in relation to realist social theory; structure, agency and culture.

2.9.3 Culture

Culture may be defined as the structure ordering social life, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tyler, 1974). The domain of culture focuses on ideas and beliefs of society where one finds “all things capable of being grasped, deciphered, understood or known by someone” (Archer, 1996, p.104). Whether people are “willing or able to grasp, know or understand them” belongs to the domain of agency (ibid, p.104). Elaborating on the concept of culture:

Analysis at the cultural level requires an understanding that the cultural system “has an objective existence and autonomous relations amongst its components (theories, beliefs, values, arguments) in the sense that these are independent of anyone’s claim to know, to believe, to assert or to assent to them” (ibid, p.107). Culture is a social, durable, layered pattern of cognitive and normative systems (Mische, 2011), which may be viewed as both material and ideal, objective and subjective, embodied in artefacts and embedded in behaviour and exchanged through social interactions (see Berger and Luckman, 1966). Culture may be internalized in personalities and also externalized in institutions (Geertz 1973).

If culture is durable and a resilient pattern that provides for the continuity of social life, which both conditions and is itself conditioned by social interactions, it transcends individual agents. Agents can use knowledge, ideas and beliefs to determine, justify and pursue their interests through actions in particular social settings (Archer, 1995). Cultural systems can influence those social structures but are only able to do so indirectly and mediatory by structuring the situation of actions through constraints and enablements (Hays, 1994). Located here in what Bourdieu (1990), terms fields are the “impositions from those in power” and the implications of power relations, (Archer, 1996, p.105). Power relations are causal elements in that they influence behaviour but they do not guarantee behavioural conformity. Instead, power relations

can provoke any kind of behaviour from ritualistic acceptance to outright rejection of the culture imposed. Society does not create the cultural system at the time of experiencing it, it confronts us ready-made (Hays, 1994); the product of people's past practices. The cultural system is continuously transformed through people's actions as they continue to encounter it.

The cultural domain emerges from the interaction that occurs between existing cultures created and laid down by previous interactions and practices of people gone before and thus has properties and powers of its own (c.f. Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Geertz, 1973). Applying this to major reforms for example, civil servants in Government departments may seek to change working arrangements based on a consultant report, learning from practitioner training and literature, or from beliefs about organisational rules based on previous experiences in other departments or change programmes. Politicians may seek to change working arrangements in public sector organisations based on cultural political belief systems or public management concepts or beliefs about funding and economic models. Understanding reforms necessitates accounting for cultural systems and how through situated interactions they may constrain or enable, or may or may not be transformed.

2.9.4 Structure

The word structure can have two closely related meanings. A structure can be an "ensemble of various objects whose relationships create a single overall object that 'has' a structure" (Olsen, 2010, p.8), such as an institution, the class structure, or the age-group structure. A second meaning of structure stresses that the "whole has emergent properties that differ from the properties of the things inside the structure" (ibid). If it is a social structure, the emergent properties are changing over time, whereas in a physical structure, such as water molecules, for example, the emergent properties might be somewhat constant over time.

Structure usually refers to both the internal organisation of something and to the relations between the parts that make it work/act the way it typically does. A single structure is not determining of action because so many different structures and institutions are overlapping and interwoven in the social and natural worlds at one time (Olsen, 2010). Three important characteristics of structure influence how it should be analysed; autonomy, anterior, and causal influence (Archer, 1995). The autonomous existence of structures means, although interconnected, they are different from culture and people, hence analytically, structure ought not to be conflated with culture or agency. Secondly, since people are born into pre-existing

structures, “their prior existence frequently constrains the meanings which can be imposed or made to stick” (ibid, p.176). The third characteristic is that structures and their component elements have causal powers and it is these which are explored in the structural domain. Sometimes causal powers are exerted and have influence on people’s actions, sometimes not, and sometimes the influence is obscured at the event level. Furthermore, people can exercise their creative powers; they can be reflexive and innovative. Thus, whilst structure and agency are existentially independent (Fleetwood and Ackroyd, 2004), they are contingent and not deterministic. Structure can structurally condition but not determine action. To determine action would be to conflate what it is, with what we think it is (Archer, 1995; 1996).

2.9.5 Agency

Agency refers to the reflexive, creative, innovative, and purposeful actions of people and the choices they make in their daily lives (Barker, 2003), that reinforce existing structures and cultures or transform them (Archer, 1996). The intention and motivation of an agent (an individual with the capacity to act) is based on certain beliefs and values and these will shape his/her action. Actions may be constrained or enabled depending on a number of elements, such as the availability of resources, the value and belief systems, the dominance of a particular ideology, and power (Bhaskar, 2013). Analysing at the agency level avoids the conflation of people with structure or culture. It recognises and incorporates the power that people have in shaping social reality. People are not passive beings whose actions are automatically triggered by the forces of structure and culture (Garfinkel, 1967). Whilst structures and cultures can enable and constrain action, people are reflexive actors with power to shape social reality through choices, notwithstanding the impositions made upon them from the socio-cultural system (ibid). The actions of people do not mirror the cultural system but “can show a significant degree of independent variation” (Archer, 1996, p.185), crucially accounting for change or stability of structure and culture (ibid).

An agent’s intentions are formed by belief systems, the power of circumstances, and opportunity (Archer, 1995). As a result of social interactions, transformed structures and cultures can thereafter be “held to exert a causal influence upon subsequent interaction, by shaping the situations in which later ‘generations’ of actors find themselves and by endowing various agents with different vested interests according to the positions they occupy in the structures they inherit” (Archer, 1995, p.90). Though often unintended, and existing independently of our wishes for what society should be like, the agency of people can shape society, and is therefore real.

In this study, for example, the imposition of reform indicates a public sector configuration that was desired by New Labour. By what agential power was it realised or resisted? Depending on the beliefs of the key parties involved, their positions, roles and circumstances they could choose to accept or decline some or all of these impositions. Agency is therefore fundamental towards the success of the change, towards the possibility of shifting institutional logics to create new organisations (Greenwood *et al.*, 2011).

2.9.6 Corporate agency

Agency is dynamic, it changes, it is not static; people in different settings have different emergent properties (Horrocks, 2009). Humans can possess agency as individuals, as people with roles and positions, and as groups and collectivities who may be more or less ‘powerful’ in decision-making situations (Archer, 1995). Thus we can differentiate between two types of agent, the corporate and the primary agent (Bourdieu, 1986; Archer, 1995, 2000; 2003; Scott, 2001; List and Pettit, 2011). The sociologist Mills (1956), drew attention to the notion of the elite as holders of positions of command (Scott, 2001). The term corporate agents refers to groups such as “self-conscious vested interest groups, promotive interest groups, social movements and defensive associations” that are defined essentially by their ability to articulate and organise (Archer, 1995, p.258). Corporate agents have the capacity to influence stability and change. “For only those who are aware of what they want, can articulate it to themselves and others, and have organized in order to get it, can engage in concerted action to re-shape or retain the structural or cultural feature in question” (ibid). This study utilises the concept of corporate agents, through analysing and reflecting upon the prevailing dominance of groups and how power shifts through the ascension of new groups to positions of dominance, from positions of less authority, as primary agents.

Primary agents lack a say in structural or cultural modelling in either society or in a given institutional sector. This is not to say they do not affect such organisation or reorganisation, but the effects of primary agents are not practically or verbally articulated; they have no strategic aim. Archer (1995; 2000; 2003), depicts corporate agents as social subjects who through interest groups in decision-making arenas, engage in strategic actions, which effect outcomes. Those who are agentially effective in "evaluating their social context, creatively envisaging alternatives, and collaborating with others to bring about its transformation" (Archer, 2000, p.308) may be likened to Bourdieu's (1986), notion of agents acting reflexively in the field of power.

Who becomes a corporate agent is mostly defined by institutional regulation usually established by the state, and within corporate agents, there may be influential individual actors or smaller groups of actors that dominate the action of corporate agents (Bork, *et al.*, 2011). The morphogenesis of structure and of agency, though relatively independent from each other, nevertheless interact with each other and elicit different types of emergent properties. Archer (1995, p.175), distinguishes structural emergent properties through their “primary dependence upon material resources, both physical and human”. Agential emergent properties on the other hand develop from the interaction between groups, as in corporate and primary agents.

Important for this study is the notion that a primary agent in one domain can generate powerful unintended aggregate effects, and may be a corporate agent in another domain at any specific time. Agency categories are not fixed but are mobile over time. This is what makes everyone an agent (Archer, 2000). In this research, the agency of industry and political groups is explored over time and through contexts, to establish how decisions and actions evolved. Traditional project management research and Government inquiries that follow public project implementations often link reform project failure to poor procurement and execution, as discussed in Chapter 2. Not only does this conflate failure to the 'people', ignoring the relevance of the 'parts', but also confines the event of project failure to the implementation stage only and not to its antecedents.

In considering all three aspects of the social system (structure, culture, agency), the force of social structures depends objectively on the social position of the agents and subjectively on their projects (Archer, 1996). As individuals and groups are acting in situations to defend their interests, fulfil their intentions or realise their projects, they transform or reproduce the structural and cultural conditions to which they interface or impinge upon.

In Archer’s realist social theory, the morphogenetic approach, describing structural or cultural transformation is termed **morphogenesis** and reproduction is known as **morphostasis**. Both of these terms will be explored further in Section 2.8 as the process of analysing structures, cultures and agency is operationalised. For now this has completed the introduction of the ‘parts’ and the ‘people’, fundamental to the methodological approach that aspires to analytic dualism. The ontological premise for analytical dualism is the notion of society's **emergent**

properties, which, in terms of structure and agency, is their interplay over time and space, and the resulting casual effects of those interactions.

2.9.7 Emergent properties

Society has no pre-set form; instead, it is shaped as a product of the social relations between its parts (structure and culture) and its people, acting as agents with varying degrees of agency (Archer, 1995; Giddens, 1987; Whalen, 2012). From these interactions emerge outcomes, whether intended or not (Archer, 1995). In social realism, the concept of emergence explains that which results from the complex interplay of the relations between the parts and the people over time. It may result in change (morphogenesis) or it may be that structures or cultures or agents behaviours remain the same (morphostasis).

In Archer's (1995) social realism, change in the social system mainly depends on material resources. The social system evolves from the actions and interactions of people and their varying powers as agents. The social interactions (S-I) of agents relating to material resources give rise to structural emergent properties (SEPs). The interactions of agents relating to ideas or beliefs in the cultural system (socio-cultural interactions or S-Cs), generate cultural emergent properties (CEPs), (Nijihia and Merali, 2013). People's emergent properties (PEPs) result when agents interact with varying degrees of power to transform or maintain agency (Archer, 1995).

2.9.8 Temporality and time cycles

Archer (1995), describes the necessity of temporality to be able to distinguish and understand cycles of structural/cultural conditioning, in what she terms **morphogenetic cycles**. The principal of temporal separability and analytic dualism for structure and agency underpin two fundamental theorems of the Archer's (1995) morphogenetic approach that were introduced at the beginning of this section:

- Structure predates actions that transform it
- Structural change (elaboration) post-dates the action sequences that gave rise to it.

Thus, it becomes necessary to add **temporality** to the other tenets of social realism; that reality is stratified and what justifies the differentiation of strata is the existence of emergent properties (Archer, 1995, 1996), from the specific combination of components resulting in the particular interactions of parts and people. From a social realist perspective, understanding and explain events such as reform projects and the causes of human actions, therefore depends on

acknowledgement of the three concepts now discussed as tenets of this philosophy; a **stratified reality, emergent properties** of complex interplay of parts and people, which effect outcomes over time, (**temporality**). The social realist approach also advocates the separability/inseparability of human action and social structure and the morphogenetic cycles of social conditioning. This, as Bhaskar, (1989, p.9) stresses is because “properties possessed by social forms may be very different from those possessed by the individuals upon whose activity they depend”.

The reasons for action may be both due to the intentionality of human beings as well as to the structures governing the reproduction and transformation of their social activities. It is these morphogenetic cycles, which “provide social realism with a method of explaining social structuring over time as the interplay between structure and agency”, (Archer, 1998, p.202). Failure to separate the two analytically, (Archer’s fallacy of conflation) by regarding structure and agency as a “mutually constitutive amalgam” (ibid, p.203) will only ever attribute causation to both structure and agency, but not to either specifically. This will obstruct the ability to analyse the important process by which structure and agency shape and re-shape one another over time and limits explanations of how change occurs at different times. This is important in our understanding of the lessons to be learnt from project failure since much of the literature fails to account for temporality, particularly the conditioning influence of structures and cultures that predate projects. This section has introduced the morphogenetic approach. Operationalising the morphogenetic approach will be described in Chapter 3.

2.9.9 Summary

Realist social theory and Margaret Archer’s morphogenetic approach provides the theory of analytic dualism to separate out the relationship between structure, culture and agency to understand the influence of the situated emergent properties. They provide a framework by which the situated combinations of parts and people can be sequenced to map resulting outcomes of social and socio-cultural and agential interactions and to capture change or stasis in the social world. Methods that operationalise these concepts will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Figure 2 summaries the key analytic concepts for the study.

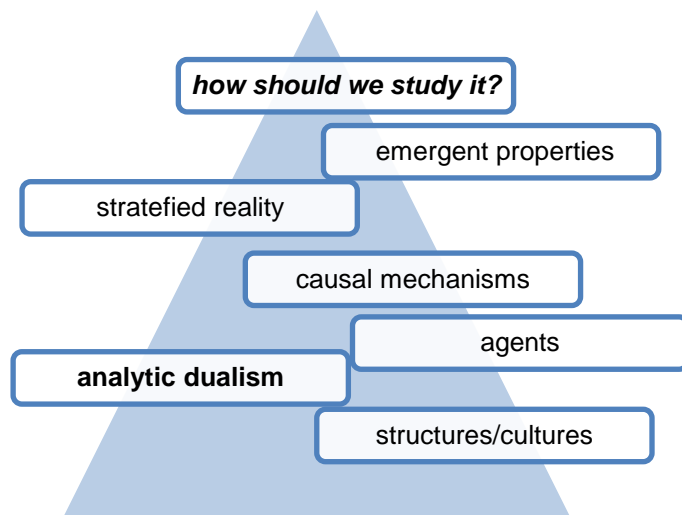


Figure 2. Key analytic concepts for the research

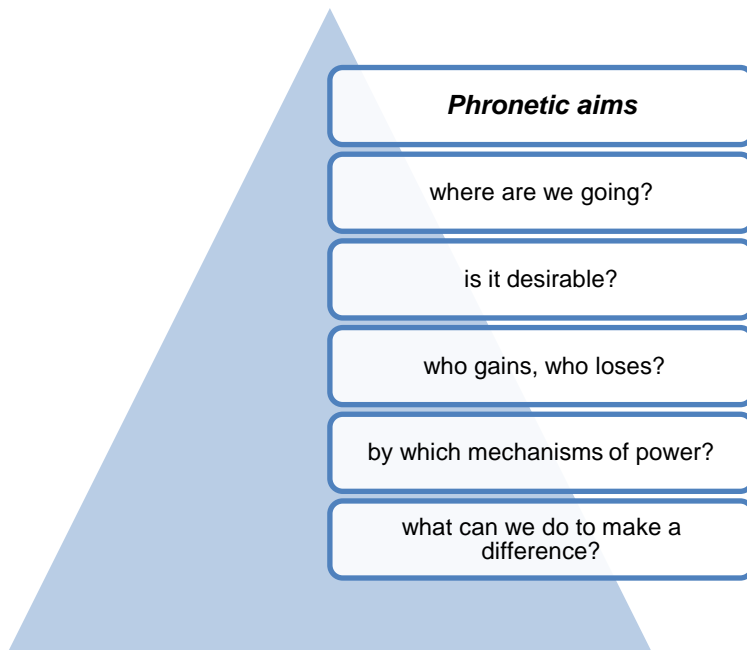


Figure 3. Value questions underpinning phronetic research.

The diagram below summaries the key theoretical, analytical and philosophical concepts that will drive the research direction in the search for alternative causes of reform project failure.

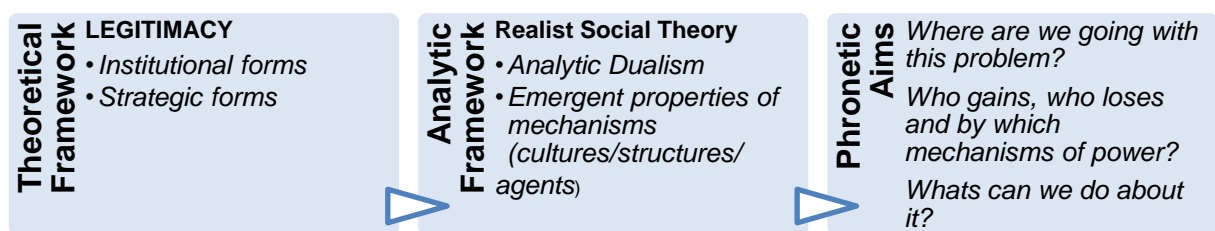


Figure 4. Key theoretical, analytic and phronetic concepts for this research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the philosophical underpinnings and practical applications of the methodology chosen to explore the research propositions. Chapter 2 provided a review of the project management literature to highlight the more dominant theories and perspectives in the field of project failure, whilst endeavouring to identify space for alternative research concepts to be considered. Exploring new concepts by asking different questions can contribute towards a deeper understanding of failed reform projects, especially how and why they begin. The review of extant project management literature supports the call for viewing public projects more critically (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006), challenging the dominant epistemological and ontological commitments of much project research. The review offered a conceptual scaffolding of *legitimacy* (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Scott, 1983), as well as its multiple sources (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005; Pollitt, 2001; Dunleavy *et al.*, 2006), and the devices that create it (Brunsson, 1989; Krebs and Jackson, 2007; Greenwood *et al.*, 2011).

The legitimacy landscape serves as the theoretical backdrop for what has become a common story, that is, public projects that fail. This research aims to re-tell the story of one such failure (the FiReControl Project), from a different starting point; asking questions, not of project delivery but of the political ideation and approval of the policy that preceded it.

The projects and escalation literature suggests there is scope for project failure research that looks more *widely* and more *deeply* beyond the delivery lifecycle, from political inception to final public inquiry analysis to find explanations for the phenomenon (Drummond, 1996; Jones and Jacobs, 2006; Kelcun *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, the guiding philosophy of this research to find out ‘what else is there’ offers a coherent ontological approach towards this explanatory aim to consider wider context and greater depth, than taken-for-granted approaches. The project management literature also indicates there is a diverse range of possible influences on decision making to approve complex public reform projects (Georgiados, 2003; Weick, 1979; Flyvbjerg, 2008), suggesting a need for research to adopt a multi-level analysis of failing projects. In the quest for explanatory research that can provide greater theoretical understanding by acknowledging the complex interactions of multi-stakeholder reform projects, the research adopts a critical realist (Bhaskar, 1975, 1978, 1998; Archer, 1995, 1996), perspective. This

perspective facilitates greater theoretical understanding of the events that caused the FiReControl project to be approved.

Critical realism, as both a guiding philosophy and as a method, facilitates looking beyond single layers of influence such as structure or agency and supports multi-level analysis (Archer, 1995). It recognises that reality manifests across three domains, the real, the actual and the empirical (Bhaskar, 1978), and is not located in a single level of investigation, for example, an individual Government minister, the project or procurement teams or public sector departments, or the sponsoring or supply organisations. Furthermore, critical realism acknowledges fundamentally the interaction of the reality domains, of individuals with society (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, 1998), through the identification of causal tendencies. These are distinct from cause and effect concepts of the positivist tradition. Analysing the tendencies of causal mechanisms to interact in certain ways (Potter, 2001), enables the interactive natures of structures, cultures and agents, involved in public service reform policy that leads to major public sector projects to be exposed (Sayer, 2000).

This chapter explains in detail the philosophical rationale for the research design to answer the research questions which will be stated in Section 3.3.5

3.1 Philosophical orientations of the research design

Yin (1994, p.19) provides an instructive definition of research design:

“Colloquially, a research design is an action plan for getting from here to there, where here may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered, and there is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions. Between “here” and “there” may be found a number of major steps”.

Accordingly, research design refers to the ontological and epistemological foundations of the research project that justify the chosen methodological approach and the appropriate research methods used for the collection and analysis of the relevant data. Coherence and utility is required between each elemental step in the research design to facilitate cogent answering of the research questions.

Research philosophy mainly considers the ontology and epistemology of the researcher embracing personal beliefs and how they view the world (Yin, 1994). Thus, research questions will depend on the world view of the researcher and their ontological notions about the nature

of reality, and their epistemology, the researcher's relationship to that reality, and the "general set of assumptions about the best ways of inquiring into the nature of the world' (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2003). Similarly, the choice of research methods must also be based on the researcher's philosophy of inquiry and the level of congruence between the inquiry paradigms (Denzin, 2011). The choice of methods will ultimately determine the ability for research to answer the questions it poses.

3.1.2 Ontology

Three dominant ontological perspectives are relativism, representationalism and nominalism (Easterby-smith *et al.*, 2003). Adherents to the relativist paradigm assert that the truth requires consensus between different viewpoints and that 'facts' are dependent on the viewpoint of the observer. Representationalists perceive facts to be real or concrete but not directly accessible and they understand truth to be discoverable through the verification of predictions about those facts. The perspective of nominalism considers all facts to be human creations and truth depends on who is establishing it (Van Maanen, 2011).

Responding to the ontological question on the nature of reality, this research adopts a mixed ontological view that appreciates aspects of both representationalism and relativism. The research appreciates that social conditions have real consequences whether they are observed or not (representationalism), and from a relativist perspective, that social life is generated by the actions of individuals and also has an external impact on them (Fleetwood and Ackroyd, 2004). Avoiding the ontological dichotomy inherent to quantitative and qualitative approaches critical realists' talk of intensive and extensive research, embracing both approaches and their usefulness in the search for generative mechanisms and in how they manifest themselves in various social contexts (Danermark *et al.*, 2002; Sayer, 2000). The potential problem is then one of aligning congruently such a hybrid ontology with an epistemology (Easterby-Smith, 2003). Fortunately, it is possible to de-couple the epistemological question of how we obtain knowledge of reality from the ontological debate based on the assumption that social reality is independent of us and exists regardless of whether we are aware of it (Collis and Hussey, 2009). The ontological perspective has been briefly defined for the research; however, this will be explored in greater detail as the guiding philosophy of the research is discussed in Section 3.1.4.

3.1.3 Epistemology

The continuum of epistemological perspectives spans three main categories, positivism, interpretivism and constructivism, which loosely correspond to the aforementioned ontological

continuum of representationalism, relativism, and nominalism (Easterby-Smith, 2003). However, these couplings are not fixed since one's views on the nature of reality may be independent of one's views on the nature of knowledge. With its emphasis on quantitative methods of investigation, empirical data collection, reductionism and cause and effect orientation, positivism favours research methods such as experiments, surveys, quantitative data and statistical analysis (Morgan, 2006). Interpretive studies on the other hand generally attempt to understand phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them (Myers, 1997). Unlike positivism, interpretive research does not predefine dependent and independent variables, it rejects the notions of theory-neutral observations and the idea of universal laws but focuses on the full complexity of human sense making as the situation emerges (Kaplan and Maxwell, 2005). Interpretivism asserts there are multiple realities and multiple truths. There is no one objective, universal reality, nor truth.

The 'weak' version of interpretivism considers there may be a reality 'out there' external to human social actors but we have no direct access to this. For interpretevists at the other 'strong' end of the spectrum, all reality is a construction, there is no reality outside of our social constructions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). This perspective is called social constructionism/constructivism, which adheres to the existence of multiple truths, no objective, universal truth, just contrasting (sometimes-competing) definitions of truth (Rogers, 2012). People may hold apparently conflicting 'truths' simultaneously. Thus, proponents of interpretivism and constructivism share goals of understanding meaning and the complex world of the lived experience from the point of view of those who live it (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

Interpretive researchers start out with the assumption that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). Positivism is oriented towards an external and true reality and interpretivism recognises multiple realities based on different observers. In opposition to positivism, constructivism advocates that there is no independent reality and that all facts and notions of reality are human constructions (ibid). Furthermore, such social constructions of reality are also in a constant state of revision and reinvention as a result of ongoing social interactions (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

Positivist approaches to epistemology do not chime with the researcher's personal worldview. Notwithstanding this however, this study is situated in the very real and frequently occurring phenomena of public project failure, which has real consequences and implications to the

affected public sector and the economy in general. The dataset is qualitative, historic, and as such beyond any current control. Furthermore, the research aspires to the concept of phronesis and uses practical wisdom (Flyvbjerg, 2001) to contribute to making a difference to the specific problem of failure in major Government reform projects in the UK. A significant element of socially constructed phenomena will be explored given the theoretical lenses of legitimating devices (rhetoric) and structures (Government institutions). As well as rejecting that there is a single objective truth, the notion that everything is constructed as in extreme social constructivism, is also rejected.

However, there can “be an objective reality that is what it is only because we think it is what it is” through the “collective attribution of status functions” (Searle, 1998, p. 113). In other words, through collective intentions, we assign to physical entities various symbolic functions. Alvesson (2009), gives us the example of money. Once there is agreement that a paper slip or digital symbol on a computer screen, represents money, then any number of complex monetary functions can be applied to it, as well as to many further status functions, such as corporations, markets and Governments; ‘This is a never-ending game, with real pieces from social life’ (ibid, p.39).

For example, a university, an employment contract or a project may be considered social constructions based upon a set of ideas. However, they are always something more, in that on its own, each social construction cannot “ensure the effects it is intended to produce, but depends on other conditions, particularly trust and certain shared assumptions and social norms”. (Sayer, 2004, p.7).

In other words, reality exists if we think it is such. Therefore between positivist and social constructionist paradigms, and when it is logical and practically useful to do so, there is a convincing argument that truth may be accessed if we can bridge paradigms suggesting that though polarised, both of the traditional epistemological viewpoints can rightfully claim their truths (Tsoukas, 2000):

“Realists (positivists) can be right in saying that there is a social world outside our heads. Constructivists can also claim that the social world is constituted by language-based distinctions which are socially defined and established”. (Tsoukas, 2000, p.531)

Tsoukas (2000) asserts that both perspectives have a point and their differences can be reconciled if it is accepted that social reality is causally independent of actors and what social

reality is depends on how it has been historically defined. How reality is defined depends on what cultural meanings and distinctions are attributed to it. Therefore, the possibilities that are available if elements of differing epistemological paradigms can be fused, are helpful in accommodating both the researcher's ontological tendencies as well as the epistemological needs of this research project. Bridging the concepts of positivism and interpretivism, is the philosophy (and method) known as critical realism (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2010).

3.1.4 Critical realism

Critical realism is a philosophical approach that combines a general philosophy of science with a philosophy of social science to describe an interface between the natural and social worlds (Danermark *et al.*, 2002). Critical realism allows us to assert that reality is encountered in experience, whilst accepting that our understanding of it is necessarily limited by our historical, cultural and linguistic situation (Bhaskar, 1975). Experience is constituted by, and constitutive of, language and concepts, and is mediated by imagination (*ibid*). As well as being guided by critical realist philosophy, this research also aspires to be phronetic, seeking to explain as well as contribute to change. To achieve these aims, a more radical approach than only identifying social constructs or rejecting positivist claims is required.

Bhaskar (1975; 1978), is credited with the seminal developments in critical realism, whose advocates consider positivism and social constructionism as too superficial and non-theoretical in their research methods. Fundamental to Bhaskar's philosophy is the concept distinguishing between intransitive (ontological) and transitive (epistemological) objects. He formulated the concept of a differentiated and layered reality that distinguishes the intransitive, the relatively enduring causal mechanisms of the world, such as physical processes or social phenomena, from the events and experiences they generate; the transitive dimension. The transitive dimension is where theories about those objects of study are located (Mingers, 2000), opposing ontological approaches that would conflate the two, in what Bhaskar terms the "epistemic fallacy" (Sayer 2000, p.10). When Bhaskar developed his concept of stratification he indicated two aspects. The first is a differentiated reality consisting of three levels; **the real, the actual, and the empirical** (Figure 5).

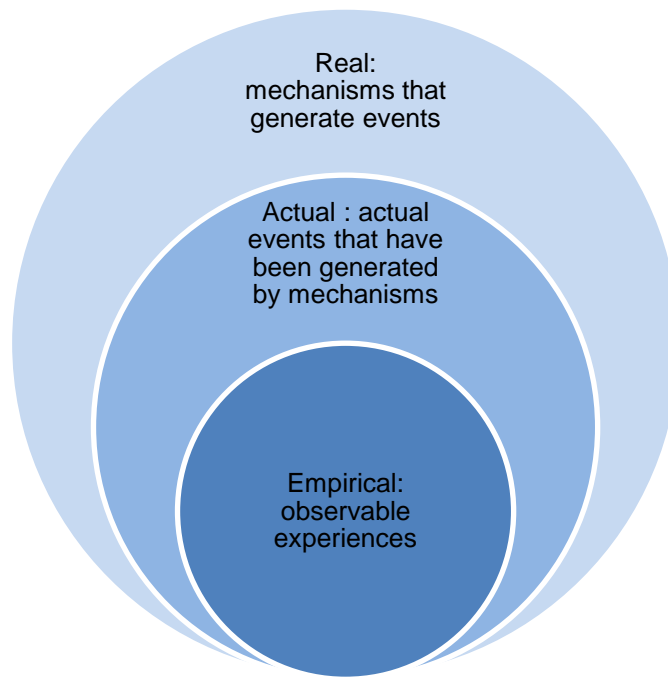


Figure 5. The philosophy of critical realism; a stratified reality

The second relates to the concept of emergence; that one layer is emergent from the one below it (Bhaskar, 1975), from where “two or more features or aspects give rise to new phenomena, which are irreducible to those of their constituents” (Sayer 2000, p.12).

The empirical is the layer of reality that refers to our observations and experiences of the world and comprises that which is deemed to exist because it is observable. It is the layer of reality that is most accessible to us, where the things we ‘know’ are dependent on theoretical conceptions. As such, it is open to revision and modifications (Danermark *et. al* 2002), since knowledge is fallible. The observed events or experiences in the empirical domain are reflected in the positivist’s view of the world. In projects for example, empirical knowledge might consist of the PMBOK⁵, Prince 2⁶, conceptions of project team roles, consultants’ roles, and an understanding of the public sector reform agenda. Bhaskar (1975), rejects the notion that this knowledge can be relied upon since it fails to account for reality that exists independently of human knowledge of it. Conversely, those of a relativist outlook would rely on such knowledge to explain reality, such as the Government and its auditors.

⁵ PMBOK: Project Management Body of Knowledge

⁶ Prince 2: Projects in Controlled Environments; A project management standard

As a philosophy of science, Reed (2005), asserts that three core ontological domain assumptions are central to critical realism;

- Underlying causal mechanisms produce events, they are not the events themselves
- Retroduction as a mode of inference to conceptualise these underlying mechanisms that are not directly accessible to senses
- Findings offer *explanatory power*.

First, there are underlying structures and mechanisms that produce the empirical events; they are not the events themselves (as positivists would have it). Second, in contrast to the naive empirical realism and material determinism characteristic of empiricist and positivistic philosophies of science, critical realism promotes the concept of *retroduction*. Retroduction means “moving backwards” and that is what the process involves. It is the conceptual abstraction or modelling through theoretical constructions of those underlying structures, which according to the paradigm are not directly accessible to sense experience (Blaikie, 2000). Retroduction is then a “...mode of inference in which events are explained by postulating mechanisms which are capable of producing them...” (Sayer, 1992, p.107)

Whereas inductive/deductive methods of inference are concerned with movements at the level of events from the particular to the general and vice versa, retroduction involves moving from a conception of some phenomenon of interest to a conception of a different kind of thing that could have generated the given phenomenon (Lawson, 1997).

The third assumption of critical realism is the challenge it makes to scientific theories that, since they too are human constructions, can offer only provisional descriptions of phenomena. Critical realism insists that it is possible to “assess competing scientific theories and explanations in relation to the comparative explanatory power of the descriptions and accounts that they provide of the underlying structures and mechanisms that generate observable patterns of events and outcomes” (Reed, 2005, p.1630).

Application of critical realism differs between social and natural sciences. In the social sciences, culture and society is a product of human activities (‘agency’) and there is a mutual relationship between the actions of humans in shaping society and the influence of society, which in turn affects human activities (Archer, 1995). Bhaskar (1998), advances the notion that society should be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices, and relationships, which

individuals both reproduce and transform, without which society would not exist. According to a critical realist approach, this study creates or re-creates the observable events. It recognizes that the results of that event will have been shaped or caused by the underlying laws and mechanisms, the unobservable, underlying structures and causal mechanisms. It is these which the research seeks to understand and explain. Structures and mechanisms are fundamental concepts in critical realism (Bhaskar, 1975; Archer, 1995; Sayer, 2000; Danermark, 2002), and the next section defines these in the context of this research.

3.1.5 Mechanisms

At a general level, a mechanism is a causal structure that can trigger events (Bhaskar 1998), and they are at the centre of a critical realist methodology. Bechtel and Abrahamsen (2005, p.423) describe a mechanism as “a structure performing a function in virtue of its component parts, component operations, and their organization. The orchestrated functioning of the mechanism is responsible for one or more phenomena”. The component parts and operations may be entities and activities such as managers, directors, policies or departments, for example. Thus, entities are seen as the objects in mechanisms and activities are what these entities do, and it is the interaction of parts as a core element of a mechanism’s productive behaviour (Archer, 1995; Danermark, 2002). However, critical realists reject the idea that mechanisms have linear causality producing the same outcome each time, emphasizing instead that the outcome of a mechanism is contextual, i.e. dependent on other mechanisms. Thus, a mechanism may produce an outcome in one context, and another in a different context. The concept of emergence is central to the workings of mechanisms and it is the complex interplay of the objects that make up the unique, contextualised combination that will trigger a mechanism, and produce an outcome that is dependent on, but not reducible to the objects (Bechtel and Abrahamsen, 2005).

3.1.6 Structures

Structure can be interpreted in two closely related ways. Firstly, it can be seen as a collection of various objects whose combined relationships create a single overall object which has a structure (such as the class structure, or the age-group structure). Secondly, it can be seen as a whole structure which has emergent properties that differ from the properties of the things inside the structure (Olsen 2010). Due to the combination of objects, which make up a structure, for example the social structure, the contextually contingent emergent properties of the

structure as a whole are changing over time. However, the objects which make up a physical structure might, by contrast be somewhat constant over time (e.g. water molecules) (ibid).

3.1.7 Section Summary

The research is interpretive and aspires to a critical realist paradigm to reflect a coherent linkage, both philosophically and methodologically. Whilst the critical realist approach concerns multiple perceptions about a single, mind-independent reality (Krauss, 2005), the interpretive, subjectivist epistemology acknowledges and embraces the fundamental role played by researcher in the process of understanding and acknowledging that explanations are reached by an inevitable fusion of the researcher's perspectives and experiences with that of others which exist in the interpretation (Gadamer, 1975). This approach does not strive for a one-best explanation as does much public project research and evaluation (c.f. Public Accounts Committee; National Audit Commission; Lovallo, 2003; Styhre, 2006; Merrow, 2011; Scott-Young and Samson, 2008), that potentially results in findings that lack the power to make any practical difference (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006). Rather, this research opens up the possibility of understanding the multiple underlying mechanisms at play and acknowledges that several explanations may coexist (Hodgkinson and Starkey, 2012) and knowing them may expand our understanding of antecedents that contribute to the failure of large-scale public reform projects.

3.2 Phronetic orientations

Critical research indicates the need to look more broadly at the issues surrounding projects and the policies they are designed to implement by focusing on “who is included in and who is excluded from the decision-making process” and by “analysing what determines the position, agendas and power of different participants” (Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006, p.12). Such research promotes the criticality of context and the relevance of the particular in projects research, advocating the notion that there is more to be learnt beyond rules-based behaviour, logic and rationality (Flyvbjerg, 2001). This perspective chimes well with the concept of phronetic research, which has inspired this study. Aristotle's phronesis represented exercising practical wisdom, practical judgment, common sense, or prudence. Phronesis has as much, if not more importance in understanding behaviour as either of Aristotle's other better known intellectual virtues, *episteme* (scientific knowledge) and *techne* (skill). Aristotle defined phronesis as;

“an intellectual virtue that is ‘reasoned, and capable of action with regard to things that are good or bad for man, which is not simply a skill (technē), but involves an ability

to decide how to achieve a result, but also the ability to reflect upon and determine good results that will enhance life” (quoted in Flyvbjerg, 2001).

In the revival of this notion and recognising the relevance of all three of Aristotle’s modes of knowledge, phronesis is now considered “the best bet for the relevance of the social sciences in society” (Flyvbjerg, 2012, p.1). As a society we have become familiar with scientific (episteme) and technical (techne) knowledge, however, knowledge attained through practice, or praxis (phronesis) has taken a back seat and is often overlooked as a “relational mode of knowing that is founded on virtues and standards of excellence that are pursued on the way to perfection” (Antonocopoulou, 2010, p.S7).

The main focus for phronetic research is to clarify values, interests, and power relations as a basis for praxis (Flyvbjerg, 2004). Social science researchers who support phronetic research advocate the idea that “intelligent social action” requires phronesis, to which the social sciences can best contribute and the natural sciences cannot with their emphasis on ‘epistem’e’ (universal truth) and ‘techn’e’ (technical know-how) (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.1).

Research that cultivates phronesis is primarily concerned with values and involves judgements and decisions (Antonocopoulou, 2010). Phronetic research takes its point of departure from more traditional inquiry in its focus on values, asking questions like; where are we going? Is it desirable? What should be done? (Flyvbjerg, 2001). The focus on values forces phronetic researchers to:

“face the question of foundationalism versus relativism, that is, the view that central values exist that can be rationally and universally grounded, versus the view that one set of values is just as good as another” (ibid, p130).

This ontological dichotomy builds on from Chapter 2 which attempted to problematize contemporary methods of evaluating public projects that favour the view that failure is an indisputable fact (PAC, NAO; Lovallo, 2003; Styhre, 2006; Merrow, 2011). It also informs the methodological approach of this research, which advocates the idea that neither positivist or interpretive approaches work fully, and as such alternatives, such as a critical or social realist perspective may help to address the ontological problem.

Phronetic research does not rely on potentially personal and idiosyncratic views to the situation being studied; rather it expects to contribute to wider discussions and opinions of relevant

reference groups to arrive at a common view. An important aspect of phronetic research is that its interpretation of events does not claim universality, but aspires to establish a better alternative, one that is ultimately defined by validity (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

3.2.1 Who gains, who loses and by what mechanisms of power? *

Revitalising Aristotle's definition of phronesis for modern times, Flyvbjerg (2001*) incorporates Nietzsche's and particularly Foucault's belief that power is always present in human interaction.

Flyvbjerg (2001) advocates that social sciences ought to keep the 'value' aspect of Aristotle's phronesis, asking still *where are we going; is it desirable; and what should be done?* Importantly, for contemporary organisational research, he argues for the inclusion of power to answer additional questions; *who gains* and *who loses*, and *through what kinds of power relations?* (ibid). Flyvbjerg juxtaposes the arguments of Weber and Nietzsche to make this point. Defining power, Weber (1998), described it as the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action. Therefore, his view of political power and governance was that in all human interactions and social structures, there are dominators at one end and egalitarians at the other (in Levine 2006). Nietzsche on the other hand suggested life was full of cruelty, injustice and uncertainty but through man's power over other men, life had become governed by rationalities and this had weakened some men. He asserted that man must understand that life is not governed by rational principles and there are no absolute standards of good and evil. Instead good and evil are defined as man-made constructions and rationalisations. Flyvbjerg (2001) suggests it is not only about asking who governs (Weberian) but also about asking what Governmental rationalities (Nietzsche) are at work when those who govern, govern? For example, what Governmental rationalities are at work when Governments approve a specific reform policy, or a policy to go to war, for example? Research needs to look deeper towards the less visible, even inaccessible levels of reality to reveal more complex causal mechanisms. The challenge in this study is to look further than empirical events and conflated constructions or universal claims of what 'caused' the failures.

Working from this phronetic perspective (Flyvbjerg, 2001), early value propositions to direct this research can begin to be framed thus; the predicted direction of travel in today's public projects is that too many Government projects will fail. We are not short of information to attest to this, indicating therefore, that we do sense *where we are going*. The depressing statistics around public projects *are not desirable* on many levels including cost and time and

the impact on the public sectors and industries they leave exposed. Therefore, advocating Flyvbjerg's (2001), call for phronetic research, we must ask *what should be done*, with the intention of actually making an effort to change something. This study seeks to look beyond traditional, potentially conflationary viewpoints that lack phronetic perspective, and which may be "marginalized in the intellectual scheme of things, where scientific and technological development take place without the ethical checks and balances that Aristotle saw as all-important" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.373). The research attempts to illuminate aspects of the taken-for-granted behaviour that traditional approaches (such as PAC) consider needs no challenges.

Aspiring to acknowledge the particular and move beyond generalising perspectives, the phronetic approach is considered complementary to the research methods that will be now be described in the rest of this chapter. Phronetic research must focus on the minutiae, directly opposing much conventional wisdom about focusing only on important problems, much like the PAC inquiry methodology, for example. Geertz, (1995, p.40) discussing the idea of overlooking the detail argues that "the problem with skipping it is that it leaves us helpless in the face of the very difference we need to explore".

The phronetic approach to projects joins the movement of critical research scholars (Flyvbjerg, 2001; 2003; 2006; Cicmil et al., 2006; Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006, Hodgson and Cicmil, 2006; Blomquist *et al.*, 2010; Antonocopoulou, 2010), whose aim is to contribute something beyond findings that simply conclude tighter project controls are required. This study advocates that critical thinking plus political engagement is necessary to understand the sources of complexity in major public reform programmes along with a phronetic approach; practical wisdom on how to address and act on social problems in a particular context Flyvbjerg (2001), is needed if we are to make project research more impactful. Figure 3 summaries the key value questions driving phronetic research. Based on this phronetic foundation the theoretical and analytic underpinnings of this study will now be discussed.

3.3 Research design

3.3.1 The intensive approach

Extensive research methods seek patterns and frequencies and such research employs large scale surveys, formal questionnaires and statistical analyses, privileges replication and has restricted ability to generalise to other populations and limited explanatory power (Easton, 2010). Intensive research uses interviews, ethnography and qualitative analysis and seeks to understand agents in their cultural contexts, asking the question -what produces change?

(Sayer, 2000). Intensive research employs looks for mechanisms that account for the phenomena in question or ‘demi-regularities’ (Danermark *et al.*, 2002), which by the nature of the research will be limited to the situation studied, so that testing is by corroboration (*ibid*). According to Sayer, “extensive research shows us mainly how wide-spread certain phenomena and patterns are in a population, while intensive research is primarily concerned with what makes things happen in specific cases” (2000, p.20). This research adopts the intensive approach, which accords with the methodological imperatives outlined in Section 3.1.2, to acknowledge the particular through ontological depth.

3.3.2 Case study strategy in critical realism

Case study research explores in great detail, specific phenomena relating to an individual person, an event, or an organisation as the case, or cases (Yin, 2009). Case researchers such as Flyvbjerg (2001; 2003; 2004; 2006), and Yin (1981; 2009; 2011), provide insight into traditional misgivings of case research, thus addressing the misunderstandings relating to generalizability, theory generation, context-dependency and researcher bias. Case research is considered essential for the development of social science to provide the necessary depth, which can complement large sample research that on its own may only provide breadth (Glaser, 1966; Denzin, 2011).

Flyvbjerg (2006), revival of Aristotle’s *phronesis*, explicitly identifies knowledge of particular circumstances as a main ingredient of *phronetic* organisational research and advocates the benefits from focusing on case studies, precedents, and exemplars. Furthermore, critical realism is particularly well suited as a companion to case research. “It justifies the study of any situation, regardless of the numbers of research units involved, but only if the process involves thoughtful in-depth research with the objective of understanding why things are as they are” (Easton, 2010, p.119). Challengers of the positivist approach to case research that seeks generalisation across high numbers of similar cases, (Yin, 2003; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Dubois and Araujo, 2007) suggest that the flexibility of case research should not only be allowed but also pursued and encouraged. Quoting Khunian insight that a scientific discipline without a large number of thoroughly executed case studies is a discipline without systematic production of exemplars, and a discipline without exemplars is an ineffective one, Flyvberg (2006), contends that social science may be strengthened by the execution of a greater numbers of good case studies.

3.3.3 An exemplary case

Yin (2003, p.185) describes five characteristics of an exemplar case study which makes a lasting contribution to research;

1. The case must be significant. The case, (FiReControl), which will be introduced in Section 5.2.6) was of general public interest for several reasons. It represented a significant component of New Labour's public sector modernisation programme, which was a well-publicised element of their manifesto. It represented significant change of a much-respected historical institution that had hitherto been out of the public eye unlike, for example, the constant media coverage (to this day) of the NHS. This disconnect would come to play a role in shifting belief systems about the reform programme. It was initiated in the wake of the '9/11' terrorist events which became part of the general public psyche and upon which Government claims were made that the project would improve national security. The reform project was fiercely rejected by one of the largest and most active unions of the era, the FBU, (Fire Brigades Union), which was in a high profile battle with the then Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, further adding to the new public interest in the fire service. Finally, following its cancellation, the FiReControl project was publicly criticised by the Public Accounts Committee as "*one of the worst cases of project failure that the Committee has seen in many years*" (Hodge, 2011, p.3).

2. The case must be complete. This may be demonstrated by the breadth and depth of the evidence collected for the study. Evidence spans the project from before its inception, the political debate and industry reviews that led to it, throughout its delivery, to its final public accounts inquiry. This complete evidential range enabled a feel for what may be influencing actions at different stages of major projects that fail. However, this study selected one key stage with which to demonstrate the methodological benefits of a critical realist approach. The delineated slice in time for this study appertains to the build-up and approval stage of the project and this informed the data selection, 2000 to 2004.

3. The case study must consider alternative perspectives. This requires the consideration of alternative propositions by examining the evidence from different perspectives. Since the high profile demise of the FiReControl project, many official and unofficial, academic and otherwise perspectives have been published through various sources. For example, the Public Accounts Committee report (2011); the National Audit Office report (2011); Hughes, (2012). All were considered for their differing perspectives on failure of the project.

4. *The case must display sufficient evidence.* To enable the reader to reach an independent judgement of the analysis presented, care has been taken to include a balanced and sufficient level of critical evidence within the report as can hopefully be demonstrated by Table 1 (c.f. Section 3.4), and the large number of additional sources cited.

5. *The case must be composed in an engaging manner.* The research angle offers a new perspective to the common problem of project failure. It seeks to be engaging by offering a novel approach that combines an uncommon project research methodology (critical realism), with two critical methods (critical hermeneutics and morphogenetic sequence analysis). The combination offers the ontological depth required for phronetic research, the aim of which is to contribute something beyond findings that simply conclude tighter project controls are required, as found by Government evaluation reports (PAC, 2011; NAO, 2011).

3.3.4 Problematising for research questions

Case study questions typically take the form of ‘how’ and ‘why’ (Yin, 2009). Before the research questions were formulated a process of problematisation occurred by reading a broad range of literature spanning several fields connected to the concept of project failure. Whilst much has been written about causes of failure endogenous to projects and their delivery (Staw and Ross, 1987; Lovallo, 2003; Styhre, 2006; Meredith and Mantel, 2011), there is a paucity linking project failure to the exogenous events occurring before projects even begin that influence their ideation, and which can further influence their failing trajectory, significantly.

It is useful at this stage to explain the journey this research took in arriving at a methodological approach. Initially after deciding to look beyond project delivery to the early stages of policy ideation and the influence of legitimacy in the politics of projects, the first methodological choice was critical hermeneutics. This methodology would have enabled underlying meaning to be revealed in the key documents illuminating how devices such as rhetoric may be used to enable or constrain decisions and action. After further reading, revealing the presence of rhetoric as a mechanism of influence, though not explored in Government project evaluations, would nevertheless seem to be a highly likely outcome of probing into political debates about reform. I ventured that this level of analysis may not be sufficient; there may be other less visible causal influences. It was at this stage that critical realism came to my attention.

A critical realist perspective was found to be less common in the public policy and project field, thus indicating there may be more to know from different ontological and methodological perspectives. Notwithstanding these ‘discoveries’, the research questions did take into consideration scholarly advice from Alvesson and Sandberg (2011, p.252) who suggest that although “many of the paradigm warriors and proponents of more radical orientations forcefully critique existing theories, their problematisations are often secondary in the sense that they are more or less ‘ready-made’ by master thinkers, such as a Baudrillardian or a Foucauldian perspective on a particular field”.

Problematisation is first and foremost an “endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of what is already known” (Foucault, 1985, p.9).

My research questions were not definitive at the beginning of the research, but emerged after a process of reflecting, reading and writing about legitimating processes in project organisational settings. Hence, instead of spotting gaps within a literature domain or applying a pre-packaged problematisation to challenge the assumptions of others, the aim of the problematisation methodology proposed here is to come up with novel research questions through an interrogation of my own familiar position, other stances, and the domain of literature targeted for assumption challenging; “...without understanding the assumptions that underlie existing theories, it is not possible to problematize them and, based on that, to construct research questions that may lead to the development of more interesting and influential theories” (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011, p.253). This process included broad reading and thinking about what could be challenged to probe new directions in projects research, such as:

- Challenging ideology of Government lessons learned or of projects and failure and the taken-for-granted notion that the Government’s process identifies definitive failings in Government projects,
- Challenging extant theory about project failure and escalation of commitment, asking not what causes it but what causal mechanisms contribute/sustain the phenomena?
- Challenging field assumptions that say project management techniques are how we should manage projects or public account/select committee inquiries are how we should do lessons learned.
- Challenging paradigm assumptions, where the intention was not to become fixated that a critical realist ontology could find definitive answers but in addition to more

traditional project research paradigms (positivist and social constructivist) it may open up other lines for discussion in the social debate.

3.3.5 Research Questions

From the problematisation exercise and responding to the gaps identified in the literature and extant methods of evaluating failed Government projects, and aspiring to conduct phronetic research, the following questions guided the study.

1. How do cultural, structural and agential mechanisms enable and constrain the legitimisation of public reforms?
2. By what emergent powers do Government reform ideas prevail over alternatives?
3. How can causal mechanisms of legitimacy influence the scope of reforms?
4. How do government evaluations account for such antecedent influences in delivering lessons learned after implementation failure?

As phronetic research, the study will ask,

5. What can be done to make a difference?

3.3.6 The case: FiReControl: An English fire service reform project

The reform project which serves as the empirical case for this research was known as FiReControl. The FiReControl project was part of the UK Government's Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Resilience Programme. The project's aim was to improve the resilience, efficiency and technology of the English Fire and Rescue Service by replacing 46 local control rooms with a network of nine, purpose-built, regional control centres using a single national computer system and infrastructure to handle calls, mobilise equipment and manage incidents. FiReControl commenced in 2004 and was expected to be completed by October 2009. It would be three years later in 2007 that DCLG would contract European Air and Defence Systems (EADS, now known as Cassidian) to design, develop and install the computer system underpinning the project. The project was subject to delays and costs escalated over its lifetime. DCLG cancelled the project in December 2010 after concluding that it could not be delivered to an acceptable timeframe. At the point the decision to cancel was made, DCLG estimated it had spent £469 million on the project and calculated that completion

would take the total project cost to £635 million, more than five times the original estimate of £120 million.

FiReControl was a long and complex project and an outcome of several years of high profile conflict between the government and the Fire Brigade Union. In terms of the research questions, the preceding years offered the rich backstory to the case within which to look for causal mechanisms that helped legitimate the ideas encapsulated by the reform policy and the implementation project (FiReControl), as well as the power shifts between key actors throughout this period. Significant data was available in the public domain from various and numerous sources for this much publicised period for the fire service and for the ‘new’ government’s manifesto for public services. Moreover, my personal involvement in the case provided me with first hand access and experience from which to draw. However, the rich backstory also highlighted the complexity and diversity of influences from which the project emerged and in so doing revealed how ex ante evaluations fall short in accounting for such effects. Yin (2009), warns of the dangers of such cases, which are not easily defined compared to the case of an individual, for example, since the start and end-points may be difficult to define. This issue is addressed by specifying the unit of analysis as a timeframe that ends with the event (Fire Service Act 2004) and extrapolates back to when the same government attempted to restructure the fire service under a different piece of legislation - (Local Government Act, 1999). As well as this, in selecting the method that would encapsulate the timeframe in a sequence of analysis, the approach could reveal the history from which FiReControl emerged and the casual mechanisms that legitimated it.

3.3.7 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis represents the specific stage of the project that will be subject to the search for causal mechanisms for legitimisation. For the purpose of this study it was termed the Ideation and Approval stage, which preceded the start date of the project itself. This unit of analysis represents a timeline from 1999, when the Local Government Act was passed, which introduced Best Value reviews of public services, to 2004 when the new Fire Service Act was passed, which legislated for reforms to move control room responsibility from local fire and rescue services to a regional level of organisation and management.

3.4 Data

The research design engaged a large textual dataset drawn from a wide range of sources relating to the genesis and lifecycle of the FiReControl project. The research relied fully on documented

evidence that was available in the public domain. The data sources include Government consultants' reports and industry reviews, Government debates and reports about modernising the fire service, reports of oversight agencies, press/media coverage and the National Audit Office reports and Public Accounts and Select Committee inquiry transcripts and subsequent reports. The goal in assembling and analysing such a wide dataset is to provide the researcher with a chain of evidence to provide an understanding of the whole project in the first instance with specific analysis to identify the mechanisms that are at work in the Ideation and Approval stage. Thus, whilst data was collected and indeed 'lightly' read for the full lifecycle of the case study, critical realist analysis was restricted to the unit of analysis and the dominant texts that preceded the reform project.

The data selection plan provides the logic linking the data to the proposition. The nature of reconstructing the course of a major project would inevitably lead to a myriad of people, groups and organisations that have communicated and interacted in various ways (Bovens and t'Hart, 1996). The potential for complexity in reconstructing the complex case of FiReControl, from its policy cradle to its failed PAC inquiry grave is considerable, and any claims of revealing through a whole picture analysis, a better understanding of causal mechanisms is over ambitious for a single study. Therefore, the focus of analysis was to collect data at the slice of time from 1999 to 2004. The unit of analysis covers a temporal sequence that suggests numerous mechanisms generate various forms of legitimacy and develop at different project (and policy-making) stages and influence events. This informed the data selection plan, allowing allocation of documents and data sources to take shape in relation to stages of the sequence.

Documents can be particularly useful for tracking change over time. The morphogenetic approach highlights the importance of temporality in capturing causal mechanisms that both condition agents a pre-existing structures and cultures, and which emerge as the results of social interactions over time. The key reform texts that were analysed and the numerous other (current at the time), media and parliamentary debate data sources, which were used to create a rich chronological picture, provided an historical account of emergence. This is the overall aim of the critical (social) realist methods. Secondary data and evidence are recognised because data becomes evidence when related to theory and neither data nor evidence exists apart from any theory (Foucault, 1985; Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011; Lipscomb, 2009).

Documentary evidence was considered to be of greater value to this research than primary sources. The temptation to use traditional ‘safer’ interview data collection methods which ‘are typically the quickest and easiest of the tools to use’ if publication is the goal (Bain, 1995, p14) was resisted. The ideation and approval and final PAC analysis of a failed FiReControl project are largely Governmental in source, and thus were unlikely to gain candid collaborative involvement. Thus secondary documentary evidence was rich and abundant and considered more appropriate to the aims of the study to reveal a situated history of emergence (Archer, 1995). The data offers a real-time context, where there were no ethical issues imposing on participants’ recollections, where the data was less selective and thus could be more general to seeing the bigger picture. This method allows a temporal restoration of the past to avoid retrospective constructions of social realities and informant framing (Wagner *et al.*, 2010) and it limits simplistic, mono-causal conclusions through the layering of evidence (Soeffner, 1997). The intention was to develop an historical narrative of the political genesis of the FiReControl project so as to understand the interplay of structures, agents and cultures and the subsequent causal mechanisms that develop and influence action so as to offer a better explanation for the project’s failure, beyond the PAC analysis. It is possible to tell a rich and detailed story of a case using documents (Flybjerg, 2001; Bowen, 2009). Indeed, Foucault spent a large part of his typical Paris working day in the *bibliothèque nationale* working only with documents. He argued *wirkliche historie* (real history) “shortens its vision to those things nearest to it” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.133), meaning that the people whose narrative and actions some research (such as Government inquiries) seek to explain may be too close to the issue to give accurate account.

3.4.1 Data selection

Wynn and Williams (2012), advise researchers to refrain from giving a comprehensive description of the structural parts and contextual influences comprising a specific research project, instead focusing on those parts which are most relevant for the given research objectives. This informed the selection of data. Evidence was collected for the full project mainly from Government reports, parliamentary transcripts, national archives and via freedom of information requests. As the research questions emerged from the narrowing down of a scope that was originally wider and indeed more socially constructivist in outlook, a comprehensive set of whole lifecycle project data was established. As the inadequacies of a social constructivist approach alone, emerged with the requirement to gain greater depth

ontologically⁷, the data was allocated to project stages. The main question to be answered using the over-arching critical realist approach this study adopted, relates to period 1999 to 2004; the ideation period. The *key* Government data sources for analysis towards answering the main research questions (1 to 4); 1] How do cultural, structural and agential mechanisms enable and constrain the legitimisation of public reforms? 2] By what emergent powers do Government reform ideas prevail over alternatives? are listed in Table 1.

Four government texts were selected for the critical hermeneutic analysis, embedded within the overarching morphogenetic sequence analysis. These texts are cited by the government's Research Policy Unit as the official background⁸ to the FiReControl project and were referred to as sources of reform evidence throughout the social interactions that took place during the ideation stage (c.f. Chapter 4). Later in this study I refer to the Pathfinder Report which would have represented a research study undertaken in the fire service which the government chose not to publish after the Independent Review of the Fire Service was published. This report was not chosen for hermeneutic analysis as it was not published as a document. The government's omission of the Pathfinder raw data from its 'evidence' does form part of the discussion in Chapter 5.

There were numerous other supplementary sources used for this question as the methods will illuminate. Other data sources included excerpts from parliamentary debates, media interviews and newspaper articles. *Key* document data that informed the discussion around the third and fourth research questions; 3] How can causal mechanisms of legitimacy influence the scope of reforms? 4] How do government evaluations account for such influences in delivering lessons learned after implementation failure? are also listed in Table 1.

⁷ This ontological shift led to method choice to use two frameworks of understanding (morphogenetic approach and critical hermeneutics), to access different layers of reality. This is explored fully in Chapter 5.

⁸ FiReControl and the regionalisation of the Fire Service. House of Commons Research Briefing: SN/SC/3766 Last updated: 14 July 2010 Author: Oliver Bennett

Build up to the reform project FiReControl	1] How do cultural, structural and agential mechanisms enable and constrain the legitimization of public reforms? 2] By what emergent powers do Government reform ideas prevail over alternatives?			
	Title	Date Pub/pages	Source	Author
	The Future of Fire and Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales	April 2000 220 pages	Home Office	Mott McDonald (no named author)
	The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives; Independent review of the Fire Service	December 2002 175 pages	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	Sir George Bain
	Our Fire and Rescue Service White Paper	June 2003 80 pages	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	DPM John Prescott
	The Future of Fire and Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales (update)	2003 192 pages	Department of Communities and Local Government	Mott McDonald (no named author)
	3] How can causal mechanisms of legitimacy influence the scope of reforms?			
Delivery	FiReControl Project: Full business case	June 2007 40 pages	Department of Communities and Local Government	DCLG (no named author)
	4] How do government evaluations account for such influences in delivering lessons learned after implementation failure?			
Ex-post Evaluation	Failure of the FiReControl Project	September 2011 53 pages	The Stationery Office HC1397	Parliamentary Accounts Committee

Table 1. Key text data sources for the study. Supplementary sources are cited and listed in the bibliography.

3.4.2 Data analysis approach: A two-stage framework

A framework for analysis was based on two approaches. One approach was aimed at the empirical level using critical hermeneutic methods to explore hidden meaning as a causal mechanism which influenced ‘the event’ (the unit of analysis, i.e. the build up to the project termed the ideation and approval stage). The other, over-arching analysis, as is the character of critical realist approaches, takes place at the abstract level, and follows Archer’s (1995), morphogenetic approach, exploring deeply the situated context and social interactions between the selected time period 2000 to 2004, to reveal further underlying causal mechanisms. The research advocates both analysis techniques to understand the multiple causal mechanisms at play in legitimating a course of action. Vandenberg (2009), advocates the suitability of hermeneutic methods within critical realism. These frameworks will now be introduced conceptually and their methods will be discussed in detail thereafter.

3.5 Data analysis methods

3.5.1 First (empirical/event level) framework of understanding: Critical hermeneutic analysis

Hermeneutics unearths the symbolic meaning of communication, going beneath the surface of the text to the *symbol*; “any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative”, (Ricoeur, 1980, p.245). *Critical* hermeneutic interpretation unveils hidden meanings that serve the interest of the socially and politically powerful, (ibid.).

Critical hermeneutics is most suitable to the analysis of this study as it relates to organisational practices and institutions, economic and social structures, culture and cultural artefacts (Prasad, 2002a). Critical hermeneutics provides the detailed rich picture from which to begin searching for underlying structures. Public sector reform programmes are political and since politics is talk and talk is action in politics (Pollitt, 2001), revealing hidden meaning in texts that capture the contemporary political discourse, tells the partial story but is only an (obvious) starting point. Delving deeper for underlying structures, which are less accessible can reveal more, hence the use of both hermeneutic and critical realist approaches. Hermeneutics differs from the ‘focusing in’ effect of phenomenology favouring instead the ‘focusing out’, deepening and widening effect that embraces symbolic meanings that is common to all the those who share a common language (Vandenberg, 2009). Hermeneutics is compatible with critical realism as “Man is an animal suspended in webs of meaning” (ibid p.7).

The first precept of hermeneutic analysis is that understanding can be viewed as an interpretive cycling between layers or perspectives. This is known as the *hermeneutic circle* (Heidegger, 1962; Gadamer, 1975), where one seeks first to understand small sections of knowledge (a text/text-analogue), then to understand each one further in relation to the whole (as it is understood by the researcher) of which it is part (its historical and cultural context). Understanding is achieved when there is a consistency between the whole and all its component parts and vice versa. Or, as stated by Myers (1994, p. 191); “This hermeneutic process continues until the apparent absurdities, contradictions and oppositions in the organisation no longer appears strange, but make sense”.

The second methodological precept is the *hermeneutic horizon* (Gadamer, 1975), which, just as the part is embedded in a specific cultural context, so too is the person seeking to interpret that text. The researcher will have their own historic-cultural context and the process of being critical will be from the interpreter's horizon as it circles through deeper understanding of the texts to their contexts. The circling of differences in horizons, results in a *fusion of horizons* (Gadamer, 1975). At this stage, the integration of the horizon of the text with that of the interpreter offers a fresh perspective that might not otherwise have been possible (Prasad, 2002). Fundamental to Gadamerian hermeneutics is the *rejection of authorial intention* which asserts that we dismiss the text-author's original motive in producing the text and instead focus on the text in its entirety, beyond its author's intended, overt meaning. Thus we are interested in the meaning which is hidden, its ideological elements, language, bias, authenticity (Philips and Brown, 1993; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000; Prasad, 2002). It is this moment of *critique* which provides a 'critical unveiling' (Philips and Brown, 1993) of the ideological meanings of the text and how such devices can influence decisions and actions. Such critique can reveal the manner in which certain groups try to position their sectional interests as broader social goals (Prasad, 2002).

The critical hermeneutic analysis is based on Prasad's (2002), four-stage process, which is briefly introduced below and which is expanded upon as the analysis unfolds.

Stage 1: Choosing and initial reading of the texts

The first stage begins with choosing the texts and undertaking the initial read to understand the apparent meaning of the texts and to identify themes for deeper exploration in subsequent stages of the analysis. This stage can use content or thematic analysis techniques to explore the language used. The four key Government texts selected are:

1. The Future of Fire and Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales (2000)
2. Independent Review of the Fire Service (2002)
3. Our Fire and Rescue Service White Paper (2003)
4. The Future of Fire and Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales (2003 update)

Stage 2: The contexts

This stage rebuilds the context in which the texts were situated. The industrial, political, organisational, environmental and cultural context of the period under study (pre-2000-20004)

is developed. For example, in 1997, the new Labour Government were elected after 18 years of Conservative administrations and by 1999, the fire service were voting for industrial action over pay. In 2001, terrorism in the West moved to another level after the events of 9/11 and Britain entered into the conflict in Iraq.

Stage 3: The hermeneutic circle, closing the hermeneutic circle and fusing horizons

With the contexts established and texts initially read for their apparent meanings and thematic references, the researcher enters into the hermeneutic circle, cycling between stages, texts or text analogues and the various contexts in which they were produced. In so doing, the objective is to understand “the parts ...in relation to the whole and the whole from the inner harmony of its parts” (Palmer, 1969, p.77). For example, what contexts may have influenced the authors in relation to ideas about modernising public sector or keeping communities safe? This stage involves numerous other sources of secondary information from press releases, news articles, parliamentary debate as well as academic literature written at the time.

Stage 4: Conceptual bridge

The final stage in the hermeneutic cycle presents a conceptual bridge, where a richer explanation is developed between the texts and the contexts, or a rhetorical counterpoint (Gadamer, 1989), as horizons are fused. This stage aims to reveal new connections to the meanings the Government and their agencies sought to produce in their defence of the FiReControl reform project.

3.5.2 Second (overarching) framework for explanation: Morphogenetic approach

3.5.2.1 Operationalising morphogenetic theory

In Chapter 2, the concept of analytic dualism (Archer, 1995), social theory and morphogenetic cycles were introduced and discussed as a guiding framework for the research. Analytic dualism is possible owing to the temporality of structure and agency phased over different tracts of time (Archer, 1995, p.183). Temporality distinguishes and enables understanding of the morphogenetic cycles of structural conditioning, which ontologically assume that structure predates actions that transform it (Archer, 1995). The principles of temporal separability and analytical dualism for structure and agency underpin two basic theorems of the morphogenetic approach (Archer, 1995, p. 157):

- *Structure predates activities, which transform it. Agents' interactions can only shape or transform the social system in which they find themselves; they do not produce the system, as it already exists, having emerged from past interactions of agents.*
- *Structural elaboration post-dates the action sequences, which gave rise to it.*

In this study, analytic dualism is operationalised using the 'morphogenetic approach' (Archer, 1995). The morphogenetic approach enables researchers to tease out the relationship between structures, cultures and agency and the outcomes, by making explicit the mechanisms that connect situated actions and systemic outcomes (Nijhja and Merali, 2013). The morphogenetic approach can capture how agency emerges (or is lost), as it transforms through interactions over time, and can help in the quest for understanding the failure of the FiReControl project

In the morphogenetic approach, the emergence of agency (through socio-cultural conditioning and interactions) is captured for analytic purposes in a three-part morphogenetic sequence. Morphogenesis occurs in endless cycles consisting of structural or cultural conditioning (predating any actions) → social/cultural interaction between parts and people → structural/cultural elaboration (change). Morphostasis occurs in the same cycle, however, the outcome either results in no change to structures or cultures, but the reproduction of them (Archer, 1995, see Figure 6 and 7 for structural and cultural examples of the cycle). To examine a morphogenetic sequence it is necessary to understand that the starting point is situated historically and is always conditioned by history: "for we are all born into and can only live

embedded in an ideations (and structural) context that is not of our making” (Archer, 1996, p.xxv). The three-part sequence is summarised below:

1. T^1 corresponds to prior conditioning by the existing configuration of parts and people in social reality. *The national structures and culture of the fire service, its leadership and management and positioning within the public sector.*
2. T^2 to T^3 represents the interactions of situated individuals and groups and the mediating action of their agency in response to the structural and cultural contexts and pre-conditioning (Nijhai and Mereli, 2013). *The arrival of new politics and politicians with New Labour, attempts to modernise the public sector, industrial disputes, conflicts of interest of key individuals with powers to enable or constrain actions of groups.*
3. At T^4 , the resulting agential interaction may lead to morphogenesis (changes to the structural or cultural system) or morphostasis (staying the same). *Resulting changes to the fire service.*

The sequence shows that during the process of structural conditioning, structures in existence at a given point in time (T^1) are assumed to precede the action of agency insofar that agents either transform or reproduce pre-existing structures. During social interactions, agents do not construct new structures but from another point in time (T^2) to a subsequent point in time (T^3), the interplay and between structures and agency results in morphogenesis (transformation of structures), or morphostasis (reproduction of structures). The outcome of the interaction is observed at T^4 .

3.5.2.2 Social structure

Structure provides agents (as individuals and groups), with interests and these relate to the social roles or positions that they occupy. SI (social interaction) represented by T^2 to T^3 is structurally conditioned but agents' emergent volitional properties mean that actions are "never structurally determined" (Archer, 1995, p. 90).

Structural (SS) conditioning

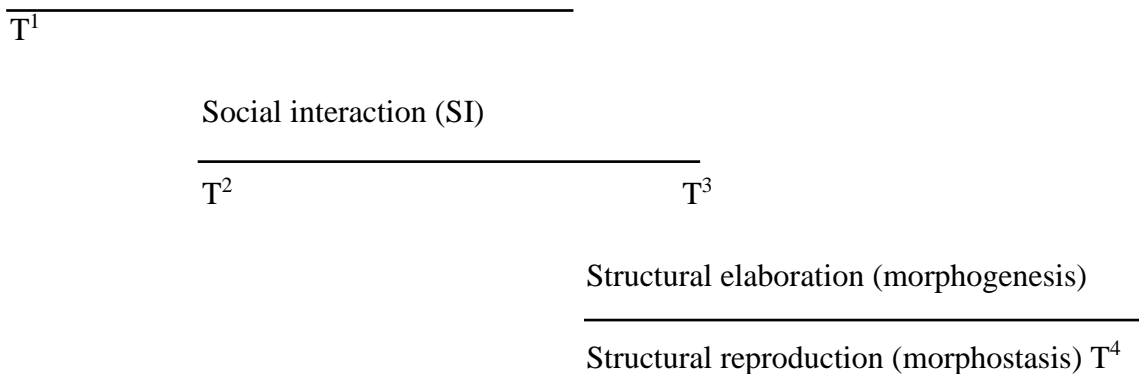


Figure 6. Social structure and the morphogenetic-morphostatic sequence (based on Archer, 1995, p.157)

The interests resulting from pre-existing structures provide reasons for actions. These reasons may or may not generate consistent or even logical responses aimed at change or entrenchment. Such actions can be explained, but not predicted, and deliberate attempts to maintain or reform structures are unlikely to meet individual or group expectations. Indeed, the outcome of structural elaboration is generally "unintended" (Archer, 1995, p. 91).

The four elements of the structural system (ibid, p.168-9) applied to this study are:

"i) There are internal and necessary relations within and between social structures (SS)." *Local councils employ local fire service personnel, union membership is high and the FBU plays a lead role in the management and operations of the service, funding and operational standards are set by central Government.*

"ii) Causal influences are exerted by social structure(s) (SS) on social interaction (SI)." *Government, fire service and union institutions influence agents internal and external to the structures; the public have expectations of public services; media involvement can influence how social interactions are perceived.*

“iii) There are causal relationships between groups and individuals at the level of social interaction (SI).” *How did unions influence members’ actions, how did ministers influence employers’ actions? How were other groups influential to these interactions?*

“Social interaction (SI) elaborates upon the composition of social structure(s) (SS) by modifying current internal and necessary structural relationships and introducing new ones where morphogenesis is concerned. Alternatively, social interaction (SI) reproduces existing internal and necessary structural relations when morphostasis applies.” *What changes to the situation logics between the groups of this study resulted eventually in structural changes in the fire service? Did the process by which this came about influence the design and scope of the reform project?*

3.5.2.3 Cultural structure

The morphogenetic-morphostatic sequence for cultural structure (defined as the cultural system or CS) and agential socio-cultural (S-C) interaction mirrors that of the structural system. Archer (1995), describes the CS/S-C interplay in a similar propositional model (below) that mirrors its SS/SI model.

Cultural (CS) conditioning

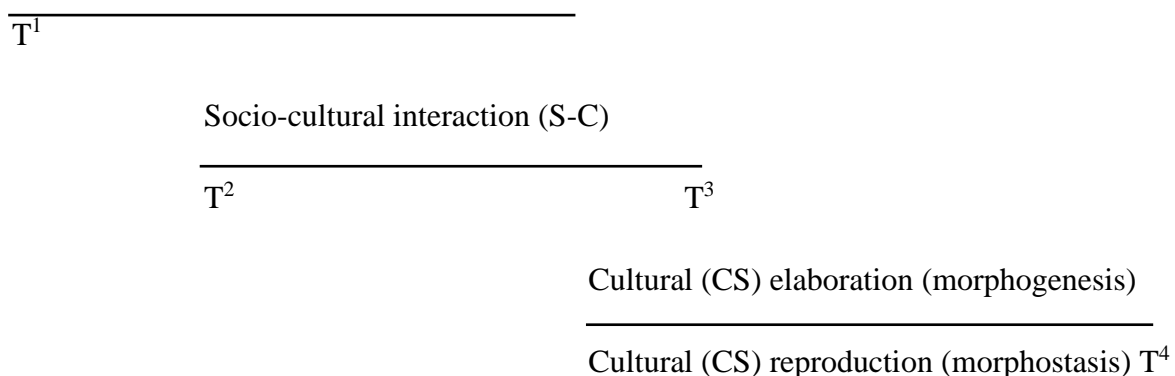


Figure 7. Cultural structure (CS) and the morphogenetic-morphostatic sequence, (Based on Archer, 1995, p.193)

The outcome of this approach is a three-stage morphogenetic cycle that covers structure, culture and agency. Figures 6 and 7 illustrate the cycle for analysing structure and culture. How they emerge, intertwine and redefine (Horrocks, 2009), is the overarching focus of the research process at this stage. The morphogenetic approach provides the framework to outline key structural and cultural properties and powers that predate the start of the decision to reform the fire service. These properties and powers also created the situational logics for the different

forms of strategic action and modes of interaction that occurred during the unit of analysis before the FiReControl project commenced in 2005. Archer's (1995), approach is aimed at examining the social interaction responsible for the elaboration or change in structures.

The four elements of the CS/S-C interaction (Archer, 1995, p.169) applied to this study are:

“i) There are internal and necessary logical relationships between components of the Cultural System (CS)”. *What ideas were held and which belief systems prevailed between unions, ministers, fire service personnel?*

“ii) Causal influences are exerted by the Cultural System (CS) on Socio- Cultural interaction (the S-C level)” *Are decisions and actions between the groups and individuals influenced by those ideas and beliefs?*

“iii) There are causal relationships between groups and individuals at the Socio-Cultural (S-C) level”. *Continuous interactions between the Government, the FBU and employers, challenged ideas and beliefs, creating tensions with varying consequences.*

“iv) There is elaboration of the Cultural System (CS) due to Socio-Cultural Interaction (S-C) modifying current logical relationships and introducing new ones, where morphogenesis is concerned. Alternatively, Socio-Cultural Interaction (S-C) reproduces existing internal and necessary cultural relationships when morphostasis applies.” *Would the structural reforms that led to the FiReControl project to regionalise the fire service disrupt cultural systems to allow new ideas and beliefs to prosper?*

3.5.2.4 Agents and agency

Agency can also undergo a similar three-stage transformation through morphogenesis from person to agent and then to actor as changes to authority and access to power shifts through interactions (Archer, 1995; Willmott, 2000). This can result in a double morphogenesis of agency as agents transform the social system in which they act *and* by the process, they also undergo transformation.

3.5.2.5 Situational logics

This study is about Government reform projects. Since all methods for promoting change or protecting stability depend of the use of resources, then their distribution is of the greatest importance (Archer, 1995). Depending on their position in the social system, different sections of society have vested interests and associated opportunity costs and strategies; some will

welcome change, others will protect the status quo (Nijhia and Merali, 2013; Bourdieu, 1986). Situational logics predispose agents towards specific courses of action for the promotion of vested interests, by supplying reasons that are either favourable or unfavourable to the situation (Archer, 1995). This results in agents pursuing change or defending extant arrangements because of the objective vested interests deposited in them (Willmott, 2000). The situational logic will depend on the nature of the emergent properties that result from social or socio-cultural interactions (Nijhia and Merali, 2013).

Tendencies towards reproducing or transforming cultures or structures are distributed quite differently amongst groups because of large variations in numbers who stand to gain or lose in terms of their vested interests (Archer, 1995). Emergent relations (from prior social and socio-cultural interactions) can be of four different kinds (ibid). First, they may be **necessary** and internally related to each other (as a school is to the education system (Willmott, 2000), or **contingently** related (like Governments and free markets (Archer, 1995)). Secondly, at T¹ of any given morphogenetic cycle, relations between stakeholder groups/institutions exist from prior social interactions that can be **complementary**, where culturally or structurally, the dominant stakeholders have a considerable amount in common (help each other's operations), or as **contradictory**, where they do not (ibid). Systemic level compatibilities or incompatibilities are not immediately apparent to agents but are reflected in day-to-day practical situations (Nijhia and Merali, 2013). Therefore second order institutional level relationships are manifest; **necessary complementarities; necessary incompatibilities; contingent compatibilities** and **contingent incompatibilities** (Archer, 1995), and situational logics arising from those relations will predispose groups to certain courses of action for the promotion of their vested interests.

Necessary complementarities exist when relations are internal and necessary and are of a complementary nature between two systemic structures like local Government and fire service. This will predispose agents to act in a mutually reinforcing way, adopting a defensive strategy of *protection* of existing state of affairs, keeping the status quo and protecting vested interests.

Necessary incompatibilities are reflected when internally linked structures do not get along easily but cannot separate from each other. They therefore have to *compromise* to survive and overcome the difficulties.

Contingent complementarities arise when contingent relations arise that are highly compatible with the interests of some components and predispose agents to adopt a strategy of *opportunism* to make the most of what is available.

Finally, *contingent incompatibilities* arise when two structures have no reason to compromise, where nothing is to be gained by it and this leads to *competition* and agents involved are inclined towards a strategy of *elimination* of the opponent (Archer, 1995; Nijhia and Merali, 2013). Table 2 summaries the various typologies that Archer's morphogenetic theory creates. This table will be used to structure the data analysis in Chapter 4.

	Contradictions		Complementarities	
	Necessary	Contingent	Necessary	Contingent
Situational logic	correction	elimination	protection	opportunism
CEPS of: <i>Cultural system</i>	<i>syncretism</i>	<i>pluralism</i>	<i>systematisation</i>	<i>specialisation</i>
Socio-cultural interaction	unification	cleavage	reproduction	sectionalism
SEPs of: <i>Structural system</i>	<i>compromise</i>	<i>competition</i>	<i>integration</i>	<i>differentiation</i>
Social interaction	containment	polarisation	solidarity	diversification

Table 2. Summary of structural morphogenesis/morphostasis (adapted from Archer, 1995, p.303); CEP: cultural emergent properties; SEP: structural emergent properties.

The table shows that, depending on the nature of the emergent properties of prior interactions (compatible, incompatible, necessary or contingent), there are four situational logics that will predispose agents towards specific courses of action (Nijhia and Merali, 2013). They are the situational logics of *correction*, *elimination*, *protection* or *opportunism*. For both structure and cultures, the systemic level (the top line for each in italics), shows the full range of developments which can be generated if the respective situational logics are all successfully followed (Archer, 1995). These in turn motivate different forms of strategic action by predisposing different sections of the population to see their interests served by modes of interaction with other groups which are most conducive to securing the systemic status quo desired by them (Willmott, 2000).

Thus, agents with greatest power to act (corporate agents), who have vested interests culturally or structurally, have a corresponding ideal at the interaction level (social or socio-cultural), that is likely to secure their specific desire. To achieve this ideal various forms of structural or cultural power will be deployed to preclude deviant developments (Archer, 1995). These

preferred social states are presented on the bottom line for both structure and culture in Table 2.

For example, at T^1 in any given cycle, two institutions may have long-established, necessary and internal linkages (like the fire service and the Government). Taken-for-granted behaviours and routines would result in congruence at the systemic level. Thus, *necessary complementarities* in organisational relations, where everyone has something to lose by change may lead to a situational logic of *protection*. If successfully followed, the situational logic would result in the *systematisation* (strengthening of relations among the various parts of the system), as cultures are *reproduced*. At the structural level the emergent properties of social interactions promoting *solidarity* result in the continued *integration* of structures. Therefore, “insofar as a form of situational logic is strategically carried through, it represents the generative mechanism of either morphogenesis or morphostasis” (Archer, 1995, p.217)

Identifying the cultural and structural emergent properties⁹ (CEPs and SEPs, (Archer 1995)) of the interplay of the structural and cultural spheres of the study and the situational logic they create, are important means of analysis in the first stage of the morphogenetic process. Categorising emergent properties and the situational logic they create, enables the researcher to assess the probability of a group’s capacity to preserve its position as in maintaining the status quo, morphostasis or its likelihood to cause conflict and change, as in morphogenesis (Greener, 2005).

3.5.2.6 Retroduction

To acknowledge the stratified nature of reality, the analytical process must move beyond the inductive and deductive to the causal-explanatory mode of theorisation (Bhaskar, 1989). Retroduction is the term given to this mode of inference which seeks to identify the structure or mechanism underlying the concrete object; which if it were to exist and act in the postulated way would account for the phenomenon in question (ibid). Retroduction means “moving backwards” (Easton, 2010, p.122), and that is what the process involves. It asks, “What must be true in order to make this event possible?” and it is the crux of critical realist analysis (ibid).

⁹ As introduced in Section 3.5.2.1 the social interactions (S-I) of agents relating to material resources give rise to structural emergent properties (SEPs). The interactions of agents relating to ideas or beliefs in the cultural system (socio-cultural interactions or S-Cs), generate cultural emergent properties (CEPs)

In the context of legitimating reform ideas, this study explores what conditions must be like in order for reform policies lacking support to gain legitimacy and approval in UK Government?

Retroductive inference techniques represent the fundamental departure in critical realism (Bhaskar, 1989; Bygstad and Munkvold, 2011). Whereas induction, abduction and deduction are concerned with movements at the level of events from the particular to the general and vice versa, retroduction involves moving from a conception of some phenomenon of interest to a conception of a different kind of thing (power, mechanism) that could have generated the given phenomenon (Lawson, 1997). The goal then is explanation through the identification and verification of a set of mechanisms that are theorized to have generated the phenomena under study (Bygstad and Munkvold, 2011).

3.5.2.7 The morphogenetic cycle for this study

This study explores the build up to a major fire service reform project (FiReControl). The morphogenetic cycle is annotated in Figure 8 below, to describe the sequence in relation to the unit of analysis of this study.

Pre-existing structures

(prior outcomes of previous cycles)

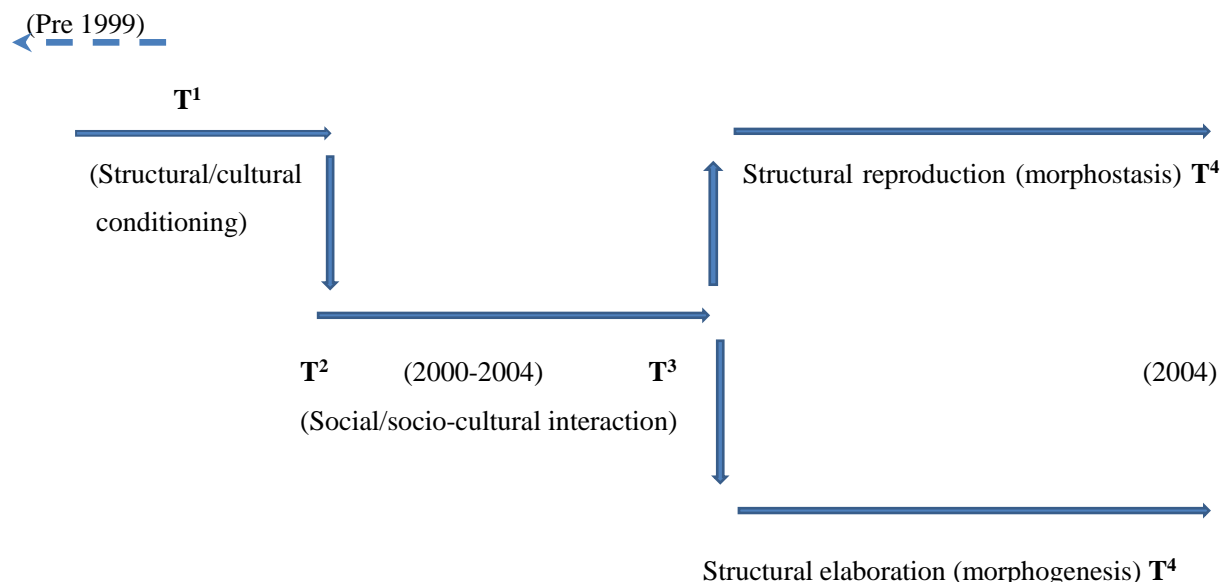


Figure 8. The morphogenetic transformation cycle of change (Archer, 1995, p.376), adapted with dates for this study.

Period T^1 corresponds to prior conditioning by the pre-existing arrangement of components in social reality and the first step in the cycle will be to develop an account of how the powers of the “parts” condition the projects of the “people” (Archer, 1995, p.201). So in stage one of the morphogenetic cycle the structural and ideational influences that were present in the organisational system (remnants of Thatcherism, New Labour Government agenda, public sector and fire service institutions, national and international environments in which they existed during the unit of analysis), are explored before considering how these interact with human agency in stage two (T^2 to T^3), as the various events unfolded. The result of those interactions are discussed in stage three and the emergent change that led to structural elaboration by time (T^4), and the regionalisation reform policy that resulted in FiReControl.

During analysis, the time periods are identified empirically from an historical account of events from around 1999 and up to 2004. T^1 , the structural, cultural and agential conditions at the start of the unit of analysis (predating 1999), are analysed using a range of secondary sources (historical accounts of the political environment as well as secondary and primary documents). In relation to structure and culture, this enables the study to be situated within a larger context of national and institutional structures and ideas around the new Labour Government and public sector reform as well as the particular conditions that applied within the fire service at T^1 . Specific attention is given to the data to develop an understanding of the constraints and the enablements of structure, culture and agency within the context.

The intermediate period, T^2 to T^3 (years 2000 to 2003/4), is the main focus of the analysis since it is here that the reform policy was legitimated that led to the FiReControl project. This period corresponds to the mediating action of agency through social interaction and an analysis similar to that at T^1 is conducted at the points T^2 to T^3 . Here, agential interactions are examined within the context of structural, cultural conditions to establish how ideas are formed and how agents negotiated their different perspectives in terms of governance, the public sector, its modernisation and the need and the nature of fire service reform.

3.5.2.8 Section summary

This section has introduced the two frameworks of understanding for the research that aims to understand more about the failure of the FiReControl reform project. The first analysis works at the empirical level, capturing the contextual interactions that led to the commissioning of the

key documents that ‘informed’ the FiReControl reform project. A critical hermeneutic analysis of these documents illuminates hidden meaning and influence with texts. The method gives an historical account of the period and reveals the changing discourse on the imperatives for reform, as dictated by the Government as different contexts developed over the time period.

To explore the emergent powers that exist at the other levels of reality (beyond the empirical), the deeper critical realist framework of analysis (operationalised by the morphogenetic approach), was used. The morphogenetic approach was introduced as a method that facilitates analytic dualism to analyse these concepts effectively and to avoid conflation of one with another in the search for causation. Archer’s (1995), morphogenetic perspective asserts that cultural, structural and agential elements have to be “teased out over time to examine their interactions for mechanisms which explain structural and cultural stability or change”, (ibid, p. 248). It is the results of these interactions infiltrating into structures and cultures that are passed on to subsequent generations of people as new conditioning influences upon them. Whilst this enables us to understand (at least conceptually), the remodelling of structure and culture, it is equally important to follow the same sequence by which agency brings about social and cultural transformation and thus systematic transforming of social agency itself (Archer, 1995; 2009). This is called the 'double morphogenesis'; agency leading to structural and cultural elaboration, but itself being elaborated in the process (Archer, 1995; 1996).

This study seeks to understand how the pre-existing/conditioning and complex interactions of cultural, structural and agential components combine to create situation-dependent mechanisms with emergent powers. For example, what were the existing conditions into which a new Labour Government tried to introduce change to the fire service? How did traditional structures and cultures respond? Which actors had influence on decisions and actions, and who did not? Specifically, (from the methods) the study asks;

1. Did cultural, structural and agential mechanisms enable and constrain the legitimisation of the FiReControl reform project?
2. By what emergent powers did the Government reform ideas prevail over alternatives?
3. Did these emergent powers influence the scope of the FiReControl project?

Both models guide the data analysis and theorisation process but the separate stages need not follow each other in a strictly chronological order and can in fact be combined where necessary

(Prasad, 2002; Archer, 1995). Thus the final stage of the critical hermeneutic approach (bridging concepts stage), is merged with the conclusions drawn from the morphogenetic approach. The empirical analysis takes place in the concrete world, where texts are analysed for hidden meaning. As the research progresses through to the second framework of understanding using the critical realist guidelines, the analysis enters the abstract world where studying situated and complex interactions should help to illuminate alternative explanations. The final part of the process is to return to the concrete world to bring together the causal mechanisms which were revealed through both frameworks, with a new explanation for the phenomena in question. This return to the concrete world forms the discussion in Chapter 5. The methods provide a broader and deeper contextual analysis compared to typical Government methods which are bounded by the project itself as demonstrated schematically in Figure 9.



Figure 9. Schematic demonstrating the broader and deeper inquiry of the methods compared to traditional Government methods.

3.6 Managing the data analysis: *Nvivo* 10

NVivo is qualitative data analysis software with tools that helps researchers store, code, categorise and analyse large amounts of qualitative data in a more manageable and organised manner. It allows for the uploading and storing of data from text, audio and video sources. The

software was used during the literature review and the data analysis section, particularly where a hermeneutic approach to searching for hidden meaning was required, as well as for categorising data in each time-slice (T^1 to T^4). To facilitate these activities, *NVivo* allows texts (including audio and video) to be ‘read in’ and key words or phrases or sections to be coded into Nodes. Nodes may have sub nodes and can be dynamically re-grouped as the analysis gets more detailed and the data more voluminous. Searches and reports enable easy review and assimilation of nodes and relationships between nodes.

3.7 Theory generation and generalisability

Regarding generalizability, the knowledge claims of single case study research are often challenged, questioning the ability of the researcher’s to accurately explain a complex situation and to be representative of the focal phenomenon (Easton, 2009). However, Yin (2009), asserts that case studies, like experiments, are generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. Ultimately, research evaluation must address issues of representativeness and generalizability (Klecun *et al.*, 2014), however, critical realist generalization is not based on uncovering universal laws; instead, it relies on identifying an underlying essence of things (i.e., generative mechanisms, structures, and the relations between them), (Danermark, *et al.*, 2002). Critical realists believe knowledge is fallible and always mediated (Bhaskar, 1978) and that there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. “Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 12). Limited generalizability is considered possible through critical realist research by accumulating knowledge over time (e.g., from different case studies). This case study does not represent a sample. Its goal was to expand theories about projects and not to “enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)” (Yin, 1989, p.21).

In this study, generalisability is not a research goal because, it is not compatible with a critical realist ontology. The benefits of in-depth single case studies have been discussed, which advocates the notion that a discipline without a large number of thoroughly executed case studies is a discipline without systematic production of exemplars, and a discipline without exemplars is an ineffective one (Flyvberg, 2006). However, the findings from this single case study can achieve several forms of generalisation which will be discussed in the final chapter in relation to the contribution this research makes to knowledge.

3.8 Ensuring quality of the research findings

Unlike the positivist and interpretivist approaches, the critical research approach is driven by explicit ethical and value positions. In addition to quality criteria such as authenticity, plausibility and criticality, critical research is valued as a catalyst for change. The overall quality of the research and its findings may be partially established if a systematic and defensible research approach, including congruent method choices has been clearly communicated. The next section will discuss research quality criteria in relation to its philosophical underpinnings of critical realism and the choice of the single case study.

Every attempt was made to approach the data analysis critically and to triangulate ideas by reading and re-reading the data from a range of sources. Efforts were made to remain reflexive during the entire process of the research, and explicit within the analysis. Emerging findings and their interpretations were presented to, and discussed with supervisors, peers and research colleagues at each stage of the analysis process. Discussions and feedback supported researcher reflexivity and confirmed trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

3.8.1 Critical realist criteria

Because a paradigm is a worldview spanning ontology, epistemology and methodology, the quality of research conducted within a paradigm has to be judged by its own paradigm terms (Healy and Perry, 2000). For critical realist research these criteria are:

- Objectivity
- Ontological appropriateness
- Reflexivity
- Explanation
- Triangulation

3.8.2 Objectivity

It is important to distinguish two different senses of objectivity. Objectivity in the sense of value-freedom is not necessary for objectivity in the sense of truth-seeking or telling (Sayer, 2000). It is important for critical realist research to establish three things:

1] Epistemological objectivity. The criteria of ‘ontological appropriateness’ was put forward by Healy and Perry (2000), as a useful starting point with which to evaluate critical realist

research. That the critical realist must confirm that they are dealing with the world of realism, with complex social phenomena involving reflective people, what Popper (1980), calls ‘world three’ (and not worlds one and two as in positivism and social constructivism respectively) may seem fundamentally basic. Acknowledging the balance of relevance to structure and agency is key to this concept, there being no primacy of one over the other.

2] Objectivity of the researcher and 3) recognition of the value-ladenness of objectivity. This entails the researcher reflexively recognising the value-ladenness of research. Contrary to social constructivism in which the researcher is immersed through shared knowledge, the critical realist remains value aware, (Healy and Perry, 2000), cognisant of the fact that a realists perception opens up a window into reality through which that picture of reality can be triangulated with other perceptions about a single reality (Healy and Perry, 2000). This is why critical realist research relies on multiple sources of data and where possible peer researcher interpretations.

In relation to the first two issues, Bhaskar termed the phrase, “epistemic fallacy” referring to Western philosophical traditions that have mistakenly reduced the question of, what is, to the question of, what we can know. Thus epistemological objectivity requires that the researcher does not fall foul of this conflation, confusing ‘what we think is’ (epistemology) with ‘what is’ (ontology). The research must acknowledge both the given world (in critical realism this is the *Real* level of reality, where things exist regardless of us experiencing them, as opposed to the *Event* or *Experience* levels of a stratified reality), and the subjects’ beliefs about them (Bhaskar, 1978; Sayer, 2000; Archer, 1995).

3.8.3 Researcher reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity involves honesty and openness about how, where and by whom the data were collected and acknowledges the researcher as a participant in and of the research process (Ryan and Golden, 2006). Reflexivity is an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, acknowledging that objectivity from one's subject matter while conducting research is impossible. Since critical realism does not deal with measurable cause and effect relations, but rather with interpreting underlying causal tendencies (Bhaskar, 1978), interpretations may be particularly open to researcher bias or to the subjective nature of knowledge. Thus the intention of reflexivity is to enhance the

credibility and rigour of the research process as well as make transparent the positionality of the research (DeSouza, 2004), Critical realism requires awareness and transcendence of biased beliefs through a commitment to reflexivity as well as to caution and scepticism to minimise bias.

Reflexive research takes account of this researcher involvement (Anderson, 2008) by identifying it through the process. This study acknowledges the value-ladenness of the researcher's experience and perspective (15 years working at fire services, including six years working on FiReControl and other Government reform projects), and the contribution these made to the selection of data for analysis, to stipulating the morphogenetic cycle timeframe, and to the construction of meanings attached to social interactions. The contribution therefore makes no claim to generalizable knowledge creation but it does claims to add to our knowledge of reform project failure something which was not perhaps known before.

3.8.4 Explanation

Explanation is a fundamental aim of critical realism in seeking answers to the question about what caused events to happen. There are differing schools of thought even amongst critical realist researchers regarding explanation and generalising. Sayer (1992), argues that explanations from generalisation are only acceptable in the absence of knowledge of causal powers, whereas, Danermark *et al.* (2002), assert that any explanation involving generalising claims must recognise causal mechanisms. Explanation and prediction are confident claims of the nomothetic epistemological stance of positivism, implying that there exist regularities or law-like generalisations in material or social settings such that if two events occur in sequence regularly then one is said to explain the other (Easton, 2010). However, despite a taken-for-granted acceptance of positivism's capacity to explain, the reductive simplicity is problematic in that "constant conjunction of elements or variables is not a causal explanation nor indeed an explanation of any kind. It is simply an atheoretical statement about the world. It doesn't answer the question why?" (ibid, p.118).

The need to open the black box of constant conjunction that connects one state to another (Hedström and Swedberg 1998), to reveal why and through what process an outcome was brought about, has led to the search for social mechanisms (Pajunen, 2008), to explain more about organisational outcomes. Critical realism offers what may be considered deeper explanation potential. Easton (2010, p.122), describes a basic explanation we might develop through critical realist case research; "Objects (a salesperson) having structures (knowledge

and personality traits, etc.) and necessarily possessing causal powers (to persuade a buyer, who is another object) and liabilities (to be rejected by technical buyers, to get tired towards the end of the day) will, under specific condition c1 (the buyer has a need for the product and the offering is suitable) result in an event e1 (a sale), or alternatively under specific condition c2 (the buyer has a need for the product but the offering is not suitable) will result in an event e2 (no sale)". Whilst admitting the challenges faced in generating such formal explanations in the complex world of organisations, the process does offer a logical framework to guide case researchers. The aim of critical realism is to provide the best-fit theory and this is achieved through working with competing explanations, acknowledging the necessity to consider different interpretations of the data (Easton, 2010).

3.8.5 Triangulation

Advocating the critical realist epistemological principles of mediated knowledge, unobservability, and the possibility of multiple mechanisms, researchers must try to approach the underlying reality from multiple viewpoints in order to overcome perceptual limitations (Wynn and Williams, 2012). The process entails the combination of at least two or more methodological approaches, theoretical perspectives, data sources, investigators, or data analysis methods with the intention of decreasing, or at least counterbalancing the deficiency of a single strategy (ibid). This study uses multiple sources of data and two analysis methods which enable a degree of triangulation (Yin, 1994).

3.8.6 Ethical considerations

The research process was subject to the research policies and ethical clearance guidelines of the University of Liverpool and was awarded full ethical clearance.

Researching major project failures will inevitably have ethical implications for participants. Virtually every empirical inquiry of issues relevant to applied business ethics involves asking questions that are sensitive, embarrassing, threatening, stigmatizing, or incriminating (Dalton and Metzger, 1992). As such, gaining access to obtain interview data can be difficult, possibly influencing the numbers and diversity of willing respondents, which in itself can lead to bias. Once access is granted responses to interviews may be further influenced both by the subject's view of what the researcher wants to hear, by a reluctance to talk about sensitive ethical issues and by imperfect recall (Harris, 2001). Furthermore, when retrospectively collecting data through interviews, individuals can offer ego-defensive explanations that attribute success to their own disposition and failure to external forces can be at play (Miller and Ross, 1975).

There are several explanations for this. Miller (1975), suggests people offer descriptions designed to maximise public esteem. The rationalisation that takes place in the minds of the actors and agents involved in failed events leads to the construction of multiple realities. There can be limitations with such research (Wagner *et al.*, 2010; Soeffner, 1997), particularly when trying to look back at events that contributed to major project failures. Weick (1995), argues that sense making is also a retrospective process. Consequently, the study relies on documented evidence that was largely in the public domain and as such the ethical implications were minimal.

FiReControl was a high profile Government project failure. The Public Accounts Committee blamed individuals and organisations for failing to do their jobs effectively and concluded it to be “*one of the worst cases of project failure that the Committee has seen in many years*” (Hodge, 2011). Accessing and obtaining unbiased reviews would have been problematic, particularly as the research began in 2012, almost three years after it was cancelled by the new Coalition Government in 2010), and key individuals had moved onto new projects in different Government departments. Not only was interviewee bias negated by the sole use of documents, but the ‘researcher effect’¹⁰ was also controlled for. Having spent several years working on the FiReControl project, information gained through interviews may well have suffered from this effect. On the other hand, it is vital to acknowledge the subjective bias the researcher brings to the study, since sociological analysis is always from someone's point of view, and is therefore partisan (Becker, 1967). Thus, qualitative research begins with an acknowledgement of the gap between an object of study and the way we represent it and this has been stated in Section 3.8.2: Objectivity.

¹⁰ The researcher effect or the ‘Hawthorne effect’ refers to the tendency of people being observed in a research context to behave differently from the way they would otherwise. It takes its name from the factory of Western Electric where during behavioural research studies, production increased but not as a consequence of actual changes in working conditions introduced by the plant’s management. Behaviour changed because researchers demonstrated a manifest interest in the workers (McCarney *et al.*, 2007).

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

Chapter 3 describes the process of achieving a deeper understanding of how contested reforms still manage to gain support and approval to be implemented as projects. The methodology advocates a social realist approach underpinned by critical realist philosophy. As the conceptual framework in Chapter 2 established, the current methods by which failed UK public projects are evaluated and from which learning is determined for future projects, largely focus on agents and the delivery stages of the project.

Towards achieving the aim of acknowledging ontologically a stratified reality with emergent nature (c.f. Bhaskar, 1978; Archer, 1995; Nijhja and Merali, 2013), Chapter 3 proposes combining two data analysis methods (the morphogenetic approach and critical hermeneutics) within the critical realist framework of understanding and explaining the data. The critical hermeneutic method provides a subjective empirical analysis of the key reform texts to illuminate the influences of underlying meaning mechanisms in the stages of policy-making, resource negotiations and project approval. The critical hermeneutic analyses are embedded within the overarching ontological framework using the morphogenetic sequence method. In accordance with the importance of temporal analytical separation, the morphogenetic cycle in this research is described in three time sequences. T^1 representing prior conditioning, T^2 to T^3 representing the mediating action of agency through socio-cultural interactions, with emergent outcomes represented by T^4 (structural/cultural change). Combined, these two methods represent the critical realist approach, which involves a “thinking” rather than an “experiencing” perspective in the search for underlying mechanisms (c.f. Archer, 1995; Danermark, 2002; Fleetwood, 1999), that can influence the conception of projects.

In this chapter, the results of the data analysis are presented in three sections representing T^1 , T^2 - T^3 and T^4 . The data sources were collected and analysed in a cyclical fashion. Information was read, re-read, analysed and re-analysed many times, as the process revealed ideas and patterns throughout the specific time-period identified for the study.

Establishing the time period for data analysis started with a conceptualisation of fire service reform as the concrete social object emergent from the different underlying strata. The

‘FiReControl’ project was explicable, though not necessarily a predictable outcome of those interactions between T^2 and T^3 . The emergent outcome is represented at T^4 .

Working backwards from T^4 and following Archer’s (1995), principles of emergence required the analysis to focus on the process of interactions between agents within the organisational structures. From these structures, the properties and powers of their groups (political parties, unions, fire service and independent consultants) arose. Being emergent, the reform (at T^4) was not conceived of as a social activity independent from the politics occurring within the organisational structures of Government and the fire service (T^2 - T^3). However, this did not imply that it was possible to predict through a reductionist process of analysis the outcome of the fire service in response to the organisational demands of its employers in the midst of the political, social and environmental changes that were taking place under the Blair administrations (T^2 - T^3). Working back and forth, the explication process required moving between the abstract and the concrete to analyse social and socio-cultural interactions against the conditioning influences of pre-existing structures and cultures, identified at T^1 .

There was no definitive coding method by which the data was collected, computed or analysed as the cycling between parts and people and between the concrete evidence and abstract thinking, requires the researcher to move in and out of the data to explore causal links to underlying mechanisms (Bhaskar, 1975: Archer, 1995). Embedded within the T^2 - T^3 stage of the morphogenetic sequence data analysis are the four hermeneutic data analyses of the key Government reform texts.

Figure 10 demonstrates the temporal sequence, against which the findings are described in this chapter.

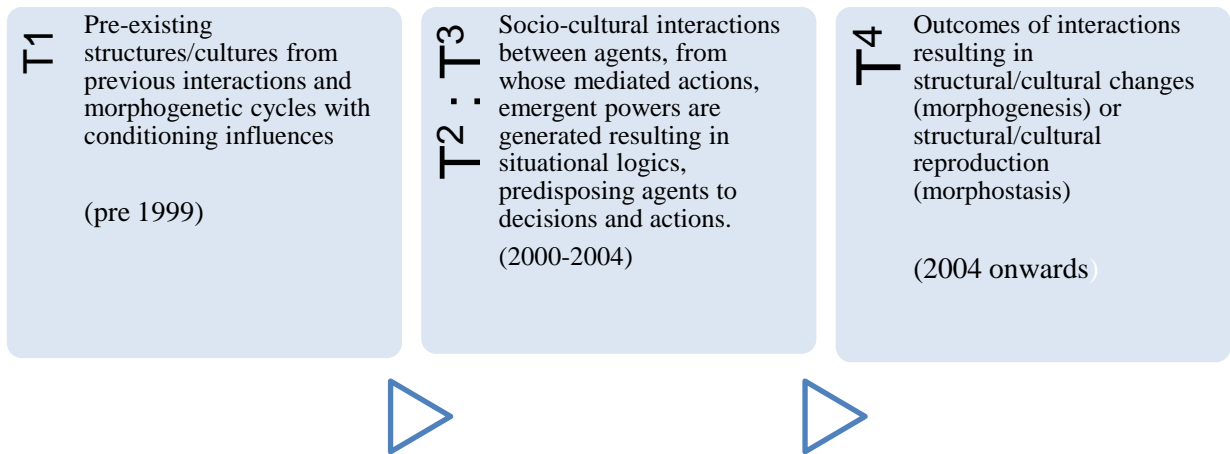


Figure10. Three-part temporal sequence for the study

4.1 Overview of the case study

In Chapter 3, the nature of the case study research was discussed. In summary, this is an intensive case study of a specific unit of analysis relating to the build-up of the FiReControl fire service reform project. All case studies require initial descriptions (Yin, 2009). The description is fundamental to critical realist research so that we may contextualize the space in which the casual mechanisms exert their effects (Danermark, et al. 2002). The description stage provides the basis for abstracting the complexity that surrounds the phenomenon of interest to start to understand the complex social, political and environmental aspects of this particular public sector reform policy (ibid).

4.1.1 The Case ~ FiReControl

The FiReControl Project (2005-2010) was part of the UK Labour Government's Resilience Programme, which aimed to improve the resilience, efficiency and technology of the Fire and Rescue Service by replacing 46 local control rooms with a network of nine, purpose-built, regional control centres using a national computer system and infrastructure to handle calls, mobilise equipment and manage incidents. The project commenced in 2004 and was scheduled to be complete by October 2009. In 2007, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) contracted European Air and Defence Systems (EADS) (now Cassidian) to design, develop and install the computer system underpinning the project. The project was subject to a number of delays and costs escalated over its lifetime. DCLG cancelled the project in December 2010 after concluding that it could not be delivered to an acceptable timeframe. At the point the decision was made, DCLG estimated it had spent £469 million on the project and calculated that completion would take the total cost of the project to £635 million, more

than five times the original estimate of £120 million (National Audit Office, 2011). The FiReControl project ‘failure’ was heavily publicised and criticised as “one of the worst cases of project failure the committee has seen in many years” (Hodge, 2011, Public Accounts Committee, p.3). The findings from the two key Government evaluation reports (PAC and NAO) contributed to prejudices and preconceptions about this DCLG project that have become firmly established in the major public sector projects’ community.

4.1.2 The aims of the project

FiReControl was part of Labour’s Resilience Programme and was considered to be a mission critical Government project (DCLG, 2007). The project involved the decommissioning of 46 existing fire service control centres, responsible for handling emergency and other calls and for despatching appropriate resources in response, and the construction of nine regional control centres (RCCs). These would form part of the Critical National Infrastructure¹¹. RCCs were to be equipped with a single command and control system infrastructure providing voice and data unified communications across English Fire and Rescue services. The project also involved the transition of existing or recruitment of new control room staff, with new terms and conditions to work at the regional centres as well as the introduction of new business processes to reflect the change from local to regional control operating. The overall project was funded by DCLG. The RCCs would operate outside of traditional fire service organisational structures. They would operate as companies limited by guarantee and once live, service delivery and payment for the RCCs would lie with local Government bodies.

DCLG’s first Gateway report for FiReControl (ODPM, 2004), part of the process to examine programmes and projects at key decision points in their lifecycle to ensure suitability to proceed, stated that the project aims were to:

- Provide regional control centres that deliver a cost-effective service, that operates to relevant standards, but is responsive to local needs
- Support the Fire and Rescue Service modernisation agenda in full
- Ensure the highest appropriate levels of security, resilience and service integrity

¹¹ The UK's critical national infrastructure is defined by the Government as: “Those critical elements of infrastructure (namely assets, facilities, systems, networks or processes and the essential workers that operate and facilitate them), the loss or compromise of which could result in: a) major detrimental impact on essential services or significant loss of life or casualties and/or b) significant impact on national security. <http://www.cpni.gov.uk>. Accessed 02/02/2016

- Work closely with the other emergency services to plan and manage the joint response to major incidents
- Enhance the safety of the Fire and Rescue Service and of the public
- Provide technology infrastructure and systems that meet the best available
- Deliver the right information at the right time to support effective decision making
- Encourage retention and development of staff
- Encourage diversity in the workforce
- Provide a pleasant, effective working environment that is designed to meet best practice and satisfy ergonomic and environmental guidelines.

4.2 Findings from a morphogenetic approach to the data

4.2.0 Introduction

The morphogenetic sequence provides an analytic history of emergence through three phases, developed through socio-cultural conditioning, socio-cultural interaction and socio-cultural elaboration/stasis. The sequence provides an historical account of the process by which the fire service institution underwent structural and cultural change as Government reform was idealised and then approved.

Section 3.5.2.5 introduced the concept of situational logics and outcomes in relation to socio-cultural interactions. Archer (1995), provided a summary of the sorts of logics that can arise depending on the emergent properties of various interactions in the social world (Table 2). This table will be used repeatedly throughout Chapter 4 to demonstrate how situational logics change in relation to shifting emergent outcomes of social and socio-cultural interactions as per the morphogenetic approach. Shading will indicate the new situation logic arising as organisational relations change

	Contradictions		Complementarities	
	Necessary	Contingent	Necessary	Contingent
Situational logic	correction	elimination	protection	opportunism
CEPs of: Cultural system	<i>syncretism</i>	<i>pluralism</i>	<i>systematisation</i>	<i>specialisation</i>
Socio-cultural interaction	unification	cleavage	reproduction	sectionalism
SEPs of: Structural system	<i>compromise</i>	<i>competition</i>	<i>integration</i>	<i>differentiation</i>
Social interaction	containment	polarisation	solidarity	diversification

Table 2. Summary of structural morphogenesis/morphostasis (adapted from Archer, 1995, p.303); CEP: cultural emergent properties; SEP: structural emergent properties.

The analysis describes the three-part sequential schema of Socio-Cultural Conditioning or [T¹], Socio-Cultural Interaction [T²-T³] and Socio-Cultural Elaboration/Stasis [T⁴].

[T¹] corresponds to prior conditioning by the pre-existing arrangement of components in social reality and the first step in the cycle is to develop an account of how the parts, both structural and ideational, influence the projects of the “people” (Archer, 1995, p.201).

[T² to T³] corresponds to stage two representing the socio-cultural interactions of the parts with human agency.

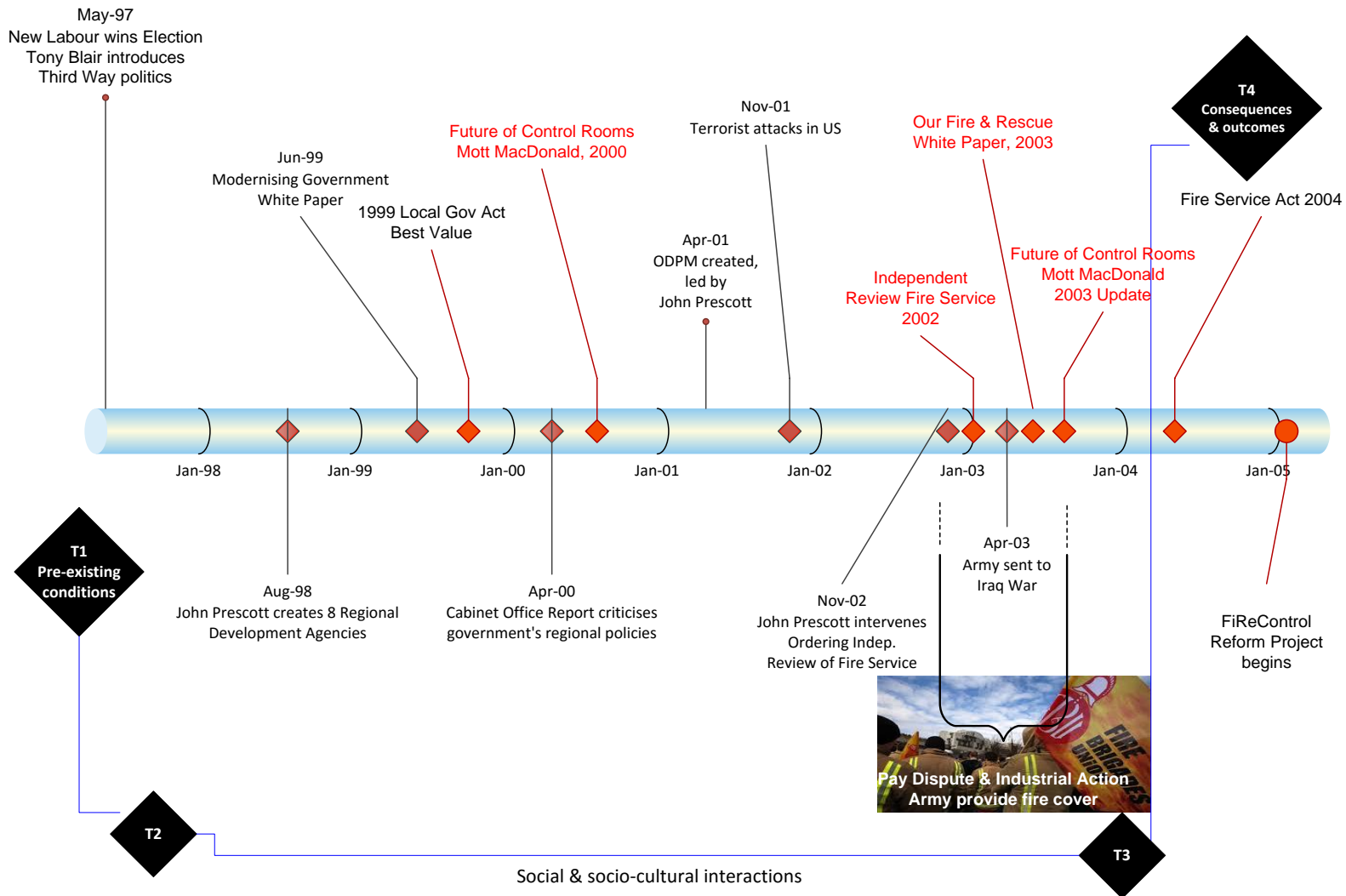
[T⁴] represents the third stage, where the results of those interactions are presented by socio-Cultural Elaboration/Stasis (morphogenesis or morphostasis of cultures, structures or of agency).

Specifying T¹ - T⁴ timeframes:

T¹ refers to the period prior to 2001, T⁴ is placed after FiReControl is approved and T² - T³ occupies the intervening time.

The findings explore structural, cultural and agential changes. The implementation of FiReControl was an outcome of social interactions preceding 2005 when the delivery project was approved. If successful, as a major reform, it would have been *structurally elaborative* (Archer, 1995), insofar as it would have transformed the structures of the fire service from taking a 999 call to despatching and managing the emergency incident (a fundamental process of the fire service), using nationally available resources. Structural elaboration would be represented by the modification of the pre-existing established relations between the Government and the fire service institutions. Even though organisational structures from before elaboration would remain after it, it is the complex and situated interplay of structures and the agential relations that are changed. Therefore, the decision to regionalise control rooms, as the outcome T⁴ of the morphogenetic cycle is contextually situated back in T¹. Through interactions between T² and T³ contradictory structural relations ensued. It is these relations, known by their effects on specific entities that will be explored using the morphogenetic approach with analytic dualism, and retroductive analysis techniques (Section 3.5.2.6). Figure 11 depicts the relevant texts and events against the selected timeline for the research

4.2.1 Timeline of relevant events within the temporal sequence T¹ to T⁴ (Figure 11)



- Black diamonds indicate the three phases of the morphogenetic sequence
- Texts which are analysed using critical hermeneutics, within the morphogenetic approach are coloured red
- Other events will be referenced in the analysis

4.3 Prior structural and cultural conditioning [T¹]: situational logics of late 1990s

4.3.0 Introduction

The following sections describe the English fire service context in terms of the conditioning structures and institutions representing the time T¹ (pre 1999). Describing the relevant components within the unit of analysis is the “concrete” stage of a critical realist study and is the empirical and actual layers of reality where we experience events. Institutions are defined as systems of coordinating rules and conventions, which are both habits that are embodied by, as well as practices that are external to agents (Fleetwood, 2008). Structures in relation to Archer’s cultural and social structures describe internally emergent constraining and enabling ‘lattice-works’ (ibid, p. 20), of interest bearing relations.

4.3.1 New Labour ...a new red dawn or a new blue hubris¹²?

At T¹, the long tenure of the Conservative party from 1979 to 1997 was drawing to an end. This period had seen the steady introduction of new managerial techniques, latterly known as Thatcherism. Thatcherism describes the conviction politics, economic, social policy, and political style of the British Conservative politician Margaret Thatcher, who was leader of the Conservative party from 1975 to 1990. It has also been used to describe the beliefs of the British Government while Thatcher was Prime Minister between May 1979 and November 1990, and beyond into the Governments of John Major and Tony Blair (Stoker, 2003). The implementation of such social policies (themselves the results of previous morphogenetic cycles prior to this unit of study), had resulted in significant structural changes to those of the state-dominated post war years. A significant change saw the introduction of competition through quasi markets, seen to be fundamental to enhancing efficiency and quality in the public sector. Education and health were the first major public services to experience competition, devolved management and performance management. Extensive changes took place under the Conservative Government’s Education Reform Act (1988) and the NHS Community Care Act

¹² Hubris, commonly associated with a loss of contact with reality and an overestimation of one’s own competence, accomplishments or capabilities has been linked to a number of Prime Ministers who may have developed a personality disorder known as Hubris syndrome while in power. Researchers at St George’s, University of London have discovered that this personality change was reflected in both Blair’s and Thatcher’s use of language. <http://www.nicosia.sgu.ac>. September 2013. Accessed 11/03/15

(1989), which saw wide-spread introduction of new management techniques and competition within schools and hospitals (Pollitt, 2001, Willmott, 2000). The Education Reform Act (1988), introduced significant changes, including the National Curriculum, delegated spending and management powers for schools, competition in the provision of support services, introduction of grant-maintained schools and changes to further and higher education. The NHS reform, set out in the Working for Patients (1989) White Paper, led to the NHS and Community Care Act (1990), and introduced market-style mechanisms into the NHS. Under the purchaser-provider separation and general practitioner (GP) fundholding, GPs were allocated budgets and they were free to spend as they saw fit to meet their patients' needs (Scott-Samuel et al, 2014).

The changes resulting from the acts were contested by the then opposition Labour party, who saw the reforms as damaging to the wider social objectives of education and undermining to NHS teamwork and cooperation. For example, Shadow Health Secretary, Robin Cook, representing the views of the Opposition in 1991 challenged the efficacy of managerialism and internal markets resulting from the Conservative reforms that would enable the State-opting out for Hospital Trusts and the contracting out of supports services such as cleaning and catering;

“Will the Secretary of State publish the report on trusts from Coopers and Lybrand, which found that only 12 of the 57 trusts had plans with which there were no financial difficulties? If that is true, was it not totally irresponsible of the right hon. Gentleman to go ahead with all 57 trusts? How did he keep a straight face when he told the House on 4 December that, in deciding which hospitals should opt out, the key criterion was financial viability?”

Will the right hon. Gentleman also explain how Guy's can be so much in debt and yet can afford to pay its chief executive the highest salary in the entire NHS? Is he aware that, in the past year, Guy's has advertised 44 new management posts at a total cost of £1.3 million—one quarter of its deficit? Will he explain how it can be value for money to hire more managers on bigger salaries to run a reduced service?”

Finally, after this weekend, does not the Secretary of State realise that leaving hospitals to sink or swim in the marketplace is regarded by the public as a wholly unacceptable way of running their health service?” (HC Deb 29 April, 1991 col 582W).

When Labour came to office in 1997, it inherited the new structures and processes that followed from the reforms and the firmly installed managerialism that had developed during Conservative administrations, and particularly under Thatcherism (Cutler and Waine, 2000). However, once in Government, the health and education reforms of the previous Conservative Governments that had once been contested went on to prosper under Labour. In contrast to the views expressed by Labour's Shadow Health secretary at the height of the reforms, the new leader of the Labour Party, Tony Blair, favoured the development of the reforms, in the same direction. Blair later wrote about this in his autobiography;

“On health and education . . . while the Conservative reforms may have been badly implemented and badly explained, their essential direction was one that was in fact nothing to do with being ‘Conservative’ but to do with the modern world. These reforms were all about trying to introduce systems where the money spent was linked to performance and where the service user was in the driving seat” (Blair, 2010, p.262)

This would be an indication of the new ideology of the new Labour Party leadership that had won the 1997 UK general election with a landslide victory, ending 18 years of Conservative Governments. With 419 seats, compared to the 165 taken by the Conservative party, Labour's win was the largest the party had ever taken. Tony Blair, at 43 was the youngest British Prime Minister that century and in his introduction to the 1997 manifesto, he argued that ‘In each area of policy a new and distinctive approach has been mapped out, one that differs both from the solutions of the old left and those of the Conservative right’ (Blair, 1997). New Labour would come to represent a significant departure from the old Labour party, which had traditionally opposed everything the Conservatives stood for. Labour's new way of governing would be called the “Third Way”. The following table offers a succinct summary of the political philosophies of Tony Blair's New Labour party and their Third Way.

Dimension	Old Left	Third Way	New Right
Approach	Leveller	Investor	Deregulator
Outcome	Equality	Inclusion	Inequality
Citizenship	Rights	Both	Responsibilities
Mixed economy of welfare	State	Public/private civil society	Private
Mode	Command and control	Co-operation/partnership	Competition
Accountability	Central state/upwards/national	Both?	Market/ downwards/local
Social expenditure	High	Pragmatic	Low

Table 3. Dimensions of the Third Way, (Powell, 2000, p.42)

Table 3 describes what Blair's Labour would stand for; collaboration, inclusivity and partnerships, where the sense of community would be seen "as the hangover cure to the excesses of Conservative individualism" (Driver and Martell, 1997, p.27). New Labour advocated social cohesion over the market culture of self-interest, and a dynamic market economy, where both the community and the individual would benefit from business and individual opportunity. Blair's concept of communitarianism was the solution to the problems of Thatcherism; returning the country to its moral duties and obligations to one and each other. It was also a solution to and a departure from the failings of Old Labour, which relied so heavily on the state. New Labour talked of reinventing Government through collective action in the community (ibid).

The context of this new form of politics and its policy implications is important towards achieving a key objective of this research, which is to understand underlying mechanisms in the creation and approval of reform ideas. New Labour's Third Way advocated alternatives to state provision and Government control, promoting wealth creation by being fiscally prudent, matching rights with responsibilities and fostering a culture of duty within strong communities, (Driver and Martell 2000). Exploring the structural and cultural context of Blair's Third Way politics, in terms of values and approaches to policy making, and challenges to the social world with which the political movement interacted, forms part of the analysis of social realist thinking. This will now be explored further as part of the pre-existing T¹ context that conditioned interactions later in the cycle.

4.3.2 Modernising Britain, *the third way*

The Third Way was communicated in an array of policy initiatives and reforms encapsulated in the Modernising Government (1999) report, and demonstrated by schemes such as the Public Private Partnerships (PPP) scheme. PPP built on the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) of John Major's 1992 Conservative Government and was aimed at encouraging public-private partnerships to reduce public sector borrowing in the building of public infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals and roads. Under Tony Blair, the PPP scheme shifted the emphasis to the achievement of 'value for money', mainly through allocation of risk. Other key Third Way initiatives included the Best Value Quality Services programme. The Best Value programme intended to improve local services in terms of cost and quality and promote continuous improvement having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness (LGA, 1999, Section 3[1]). Within the early years of the first administration (1997 to 2001) under Prime Minister Tony Blair, New Labour's agenda for reforming the public sector was well under way; the 1997 Department for Education's Excellence in Schools policy laid down the Government's educational reform priorities, promoting pupil attainment standards over school structures, as well as policies of intervention to overcome under performance.

Healthcare reforms were also in progress under the first Blair administration, such as the creation of the new telephone support service, NHS Direct (1998), and healthcare regulator, National Institute for Clinical Excellence in 1999. The first New Labour administration (1997-2001) imposed extensive NHS organisational reforms that were set out in the 1999 Health Bill. The reforms established primary care groups, abolished the Conservative policy of GP fundholding and retained Conservative market-based policies of the purchaser-provider split. The bill also introduced service performance ratings and new targets to reduce NHS waiting lists. By 2000, Labour's 10-year modernisation programme of investment and reform 'The NHS Plan' was published outlining strategies for more staff, more beds, more hospitals to provide improved access to care, and a new model for financing it; the Private Finance Initiative. Under New Labour, there was extensive hospital building using the PFI model; of 88 major NHS investment schemes between 1997 and 2006, 67 were built under PFI (NHS Confederation, 2008)

The key strategy to achieve reform was the concept of modernization, which served as a 'leitmotiv' for New Labour (Pyper, 2003, p.494). Central to Blair's modernisation was the rhetoric of renewal through collaboration, partnership and inclusion (Ahmad and Broussine, 2003). New Labour promoted the concept of evidence-based policy-making to end the

ideological-based decision making they claimed previous Governments had used (Sanderson, 2003). The zeitgeist of those years was public-private partnership schemes that promoted the involvement of private sector capital and operating methods in the delivery of the public services. During the previous Conservative Government, many Labour Members of Parliament (MP), in opposition, had fervently condemned the Conservative's Private Finance Initiative, (itself an example of morphogenesis) as public sector privatisation. Debating industry privatisation in the Commons in 1995 (before Labour won the General Election in 1997), Harriet Harman MP (then the Shadow Health Secretary), said that the PFI was:

"..a raft for a sort of ramp for privatising" (HC Deb, 30 Nov 1995, c1431).

In the same debate, Margaret Becket MP (then Deputy Leader of the Labour Party) said:

"Market testing represents creeping privatisation. As does the Private Finance Initiative." (HC Deb, 30 Nov 1995, c1431).

Interestingly, and indicative of the impending ideological schisms that would come to represent New Labour once in power, Tony Blair, as Leader of the Opposition said that day:

"We would get public and private finance working together in transport, in housing, in health and education" (HC Deb, 30 Nov 1995, c1431).

By the second term in office (2001-2005), the Blair administration was thoroughly committed to PFI as a cornerstone of their public services' modernisation programme, promoting the UK's competitiveness (HM Treasury, 2000). The Prime Minister claimed that his second term mission was to deliver the biggest reform programme in public services for half a century (Blair, 2001b), and PFI was the mechanism of choice. Under the PFI, private service providers raise the necessary finance to fund capital projects that they come to own and which, they either rent back or service charge the public sector partner. Contradicting the previous criticisms of PFI made by senior Labour MPs in opposition by the leader of the New Labour party, PFI was now applauded as the Third Way of public provision built on partnership (Blair, 1998).

4.3.3 Final days of corporatism

If the Third Way was to build on previous Government's reform policies to modernise Britain's public sector services with private sector involvement, some last bastions of post war thinking would need to be challenged. The logic of corporatism had evolved across the British state sector since the end of World War 2 (Hughes and Tuohy, 1999). Corporatism can be defined as an entire socio-economic system, or in its more restrictive usage, as a particular form of interest group politics (Bondi, 1987), whereby public service policy decisions consist of tripartite negotiations between Government, heads of industry, and trade union leaders. In this study, corporatism refers to interest group politics, in which the interests of powerful business and trade unions contribute to the policy process (c.f. Dearlove and Saunders, 1984; Mercer, 1984), by virtue of the privileged access to politicians and administrators that such groups possess. Privileged access in this sense is secured through formal arrangements for representation within political structures (Bondi, 1987). At T¹, the tripartite corporatist system that prevailed in the fire sector consisted of the Fire Brigade's Union (FBU), the local Government employers and the Home Office.

At T¹ (pre 2000), the institutional structures of the UK fire sector consisted of 50 'Fire Authorities' made up of 16 county councils, 6 joint Fire and Civil Defence Authorities (set up under the 1985 Local Government Act in the former metropolitan authority areas), the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority and 24 other combined authorities in England, 3 in Wales, 8 in Scotland and 1 in Northern Ireland. Table 4 shows the organisations that made up the fire service institution as it was around the time of T¹.

The Secretary of State	Responsible for Government policy and strategic direction for the fire service; fire service funding.
Fire Authorities	There were 50 fire authorities in UK, responsible to the Secretary of State. They were the formal employers of the fire brigades. They were responsible for: funding; budget setting; staffing; policy; direction on initiatives; decisions on the standard of the cover.
Fire Brigades (later known as Fire & Rescue Services)	There were 50 fire brigades responsible for organising and overseeing the delivery of the service.
Fire Stations	There were 595 whole-time fire stations; 874 retained stations (i.e. based on a part-time force); 115 day crewing; and 49 control rooms. Their role was to deliver the service.
HM Fire Service Inspectorate	Its role was to provide advice to Ministers, fire brigades, local authorities, and business. Responsible for inspecting activities of fire brigades.

Table 4. Fire Service Organisation in England and Wales at T¹ (Bain, 2002)

At T¹, the fire service was under the central Government control of the Home Office. Nationally the fire service occupied a position at the edge of local Government and whilst there had been previous central Government attempts to modernise it (Audit Commission, 1995; ODPM Community Fire Safety Task Force, 1997), the change initiatives were without any material incentive to individual brigades and as such there had been little progress (Matheson et al, 2011). In morphogenetic terms, pre-dating 1999, the fire service sat *within* systems of (but relatively untouched by) structural and cultural relations in which state public sector management principles had been evolving during the previous decade under Thatcherism. Despite significant public management reforms to the corporatist organisations of the education sector (c.f. Education Act 1979, 1980) and the health sector (c.f. Griffiths Report 1983, Project 2000), during the Conservative administrations, the enduring corporatist structure of the fire service that favoured industrial relations and joint consensus, had remained largely protected from the Thatcher era. This was due to the fire service being a “relatively low cost to the public purse, the high level of sympathy for workers doing a dangerous job and a pay formula that removed overt conflict” (Fitzgerald, 2005, p.648).

Fire service corporatism at T¹ is defined in both structural and process terms. Structurally it reflected solidarity in Archer’s terminology; an industrial relations model advocating trade unions and joint negotiating bodies, and process-wise, agreed procedures, consensus and joint interests were prominent (Fitzgerald, 2005). A fundamental aspect of corporatist relations is that they are power-dependent (ibid), where all parties, “enjoy some measure of autonomy, although within a set of constraints” (Cawson, 1985, p.7).

All parties had vested interests to protect. Day-to-day, fire brigades had only indirect relations with central Government (Home Office), taking direction via a layer of so-called insiders (Fitzgerald, 2005). The insiders were like-minded, seconded ex-fire service personnel of Her Majesty’s Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) and the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Committee (CFBAC). The bargaining power of the FBU meant they had significant managerial authority in directing the organisation in terms of delivering, developing or changing strategy.

Corporatist cultures and structures meant the FBU had a very influential presence. At T¹, the FBU had a strongly collectivist and professionally oriented nature (Baigent, 2001; Seifert, 2011), linked to the heavy demands of the job in relation to teamwork and loyalty (Redman and

Snape, 2005). Such a collectivist work ethic fostered high levels of loyalty and discipline towards the FBU and at this T¹ juncture, union membership was high; 86% in 1997 among uniformed staff (ibid). The left wing leadership of the FBU under Andy Gilchrist and previously FBU General Secretary Ken Cameron, endorsed FBU rule book, rule number 3 (1) “ to be an industrial union for firefighters with the first objective to organise all uniformed employers into one union” (Redman and Snape, 2005, p.29).

At T¹ the fire service was a largely male institution and firefighters created an informal hierarchy through both the watch system and the generational system by which older firefighters pass down to younger firefighters their knowledge about the skills/qualities/attributes necessary for firefighting (Baigent, 2001). Baigent (2001), a firefighter turned academic considered the fire service institutionally conservative, sexist, racist and homophobic. In 1999, Her Majesty’s Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI), conducted a thematic review into diversity, finding the fire service to be predominantly white, heterosexual, able-bodied and pseudo/para-military from the post-war recruitment connections with the Royal Navy (HMFSI, 1999). The HMFSI were “strongly of the opinion that substantial change is necessary in the management and culture of the service to achieve an environment where equality and fairness can be integrated into its whole operation and organisation” (ibid, p. 55). Coupled with single tier entry, where everyone in the fire service joins as a fire fighter, the dominant culture had maintained the socio-economic and ethnic profile of new recruits and had contributed to the reproduction of attitudes and behaviours (HMFSI, 1999). In morphogenetic terms, the institutional configuration was one of necessary complementarity (highlighted) in Table 2), where fire service organisations and their linkages enjoyed a complementary nature between systemic structures, mutually reinforcing one another (Archer, 1995).

	Contradictions		Complementarities	
	Necessary	Contingent	Necessary	Contingent
Situational logic	correction	elimination	protection	Opportunism
CEPS of: Cultural system Socio-cultural interaction	<i>syncretism</i>	<i>pluralism</i>	<i>systematisation</i>	<i>specialisation</i>
	unification	cleavage	reproduction	Sectionalism
SEPs of: Structural system Social interaction	<i>compromise</i>	<i>competition</i>	<i>integration</i>	<i>differentiation</i>
	containment	polarisation	solidarity	diversification

Table 2. Summary of structural morphogenesis/morphostasis (adapted from Archer, 1995, p.303); CEP: cultural emergent properties; SEP: structural emergent properties.

Such comfortable arrangements between like-minded members of the organisation perpetuated corporatist structures. This led to social interactions that promoted solidarity in protecting the status quo. The closed nature of the system not only protected the profile of recruits (thereby excluding minority groups, as identified in the Home Office 1999 thematic review), but also produced Chief Fire Officers that had been brought through the same ‘closed’ system (Couch, 2002). Despite the findings that would support radical change to cultures, at T¹, structures such as HMFSI were considered “bodies of compromise rather than change, offering advice on the well-being of the service rather than models for radical overhaul of structures and service provision” (Fitzgerald, 2005, p.649). Whereas the bulk of the report considered the complexity of the environment, and the pressures on leadership that affected change potential, the recommendations to solve the problems focused on the development of future Chief Officers only (ibid).

At T¹, structures and cultures of the institution of the fire service were firmly embedded and the period was characterised by inertia. The relatively harmonious relationship between the FBU, the local Fire Authority employers, and the management that had existed for some time, had led to a high degree of system integration where the institutions mutually reinforced each other’s status quo and in so doing protected their vested interests. The vested interests of the FBU in particular promoted a form of institutional integration that reinforced the Union’s hegemony in that tripartite arrangement. During the 1990s, the two-tier system of management operated initially at Brigade level where the FBU agreed strategy with the Chief Fire Officer and where most financial and organisational issues were sorted out with employer and Union representatives prior to full Fire Authority meetings. The meetings were simply to ‘rubber stamp’ decisions made by the tripartite management group (Bach et al, 2005, p.651). Introducing structural changes to management would therefore not maintain the vested interests of the FBU concerning managerial authority and bargaining power. The emergent properties of this complementary configuration of structures, cultures and agents between the decision-making tripartite were “sui generis”¹³ fostering negative feedback loops that would discourage

¹³ Sui generis (Archer 1995), as in a normative framework existing independently of and irreducible to individual social actors

any attempts at change. In such an arrangement, everyone gained and all had something to lose by disruption, as will play out over the morphogenetic sequence represented in this analysis.

An example of the problems faced by ‘new’ ideas and management styles entering this protectionist matrix of compatible and interdependent institutions, was the train of events that occurred in 2000. When Chief Fire Officer of Merseyside Fire Service, Malcom Saunders attempted to modernise the workforce through diversity in recruitment, he suggested appointing non-uniformed staff to senior management posts. He also wanted to attract more women and people from ethnic minorities into the fire service. Saunders was one of the ‘new generation’ of chief fire officers, whose appointment was not managed by the FBU and members of the Fire Authority. From 1999, prospective CFOs had to complete a Command Training Course, selection for which was heavily influenced by the Home Office (Fitzgerald, 2005). The new CFO recruitment process brought a wider professional skill set beyond incident management, such as commercial and political acumen. The endeavour of CFO Saunders to change the profile of managers in the service may indicate the alignment of a different type of CFO with Government agendas attempting to disturb the taken-for-granted routines that were embedded in the fire service.

CFO Saunders’ reform plans were rejected by the FBU and led to widespread strike action in 2000 as reported in national media (Wainwright, 2001). Saunders was quoted in a national newspaper report (Bunyan, 2001), as saying; “The union has a radical Left-wing leadership which seems determined to prevent the modernisation of the service. But they have got to get into the 21st century. We are not talking about political correctness, just common sense”. After a long and bitter battle including highly publicised accusations of personal misconduct, which Saunders counter claimed were defamatory and evident of bullying vendettas, he subsequently took sick leave and did not return to the service (Wainwright, 2001).

Recalling Archer’s situational logics (Table 2), which predispose agents towards specific courses of action for the promotion of their interests (Archer 1995, p.216), the relations between fire brigades and their fire local councillor employers (the Fire Authority), were both *necessary* and *complementary*. The enduring systemic structures and integrated cultures that existed throughout the fire service during T¹ resulted in considerable protection and stagnation. The mediatory mechanisms which emerged from those parts and people emanated from the way in which the internal, necessary and complementary relations of the FBU, the employers and the old management systematically shaped agential situations. In so doing, traditional actions

protected against loss of vested interests, whilst innovative action (such as the Saunders example above), threatened these interests both individually and collectively. Socio-cultural interactions were therefore reproduced by limiting new ideas leading to a systematisation of the cultural system. The resulting enduring nature of the tripartite arrangement (FBU, local councillor employers and senior management), possessed sufficient authority to manage or even remove threats to their vested interests. Could this have been the case in relation to CFO Saunders at Merseyside Fire Service in 2000? Overall outcomes of the situational logics led to a persistent lack of innovation across the fire service resulting in morphostasis, reproduction of those very systems. Transforming them (through Labour's early attempts to modernise), would threaten the loss of vested interests of the dominant group, the FBU and the senior management. Hence, attempts at modernisation of the fire service during the 1990s struggled to effect change.

4.3.4 Early attempts to modernise fire brigades

Conservative Governments did not undermine corporatist brigade structures and cultures but Margaret Thatcher's introduction of New Public Management (NPM) principles in the 1980s put fire service structures under pressure, and this did begin to challenge attitudes (Fitzgerald 2005). Drawing on private sector management techniques (Hood, 1991), the austere financial arrangements of NPM accompanied by business led managerialism, focused attention on costs and performance management, markets and competition (Farnham and Horton, 1996).

The period since Labour came to office in 1997 saw public services' reform at the top of the political agenda. However, significant challenge faced the implementation of those first term manifesto promises, not least because of commitments to adhere to the previous Conservative Government's spending plans (Bach et al. 2005). During the first administration of New Labour, fire service modernisation was set within the Local Government Modernisation Agenda and its key components, the Local Government Acts of 1999 and 2000. Thus, in Archer's (1995), terminology, when the Local Government Act was passed in 1999, pre-existing relations of necessary complementarities (c.f. Table 1) and a conjunction of both structural and cultural morphostasis had resulted in the situation logics of *protection* causing structural integration and ideational *systematization* (strengthening of pre-existing relations among the parts (Archer, 1995). Relations between the tripartite arrangement of leadership (local Government employers, the FBU and fire service management), had developed over time as cycles had reproduced cultures and structures that served to fulfil their vested interests. These logics

ensured the corporatist cultures and “semi-Taylorist”¹⁴ (Fitzgerald, 2005, p.651), structures remained intact. Whether the 1999 Act could affect structural and or cultural conditioning, enough to effect change in the fire service institutions is an important part of the morphogenetic sequence.

Early attempts by Labour to penetrate the prevailing protectionist logics included the changing of terminology to move away from the militaristic style ‘brigade’ that had originated from a high level of recruitment from the armed services (Baigent, 2001). In his ‘Independent Review of the Fire Service (which will be hermeneutically analysed in Section 4.10), the main author, Professor George Bain (2002), described these militaristic structures and cultures as anachronistic, culturally immobile and unrepresentative of the communities that they served. Of the many themes that Government-style modernisation would address, creating modern working arrangements, engagement with local communities and adopting a more preventive focus were key (Matheson et al, 2011), and the period saw the start of the rebranding from the militaristic ‘brigade’ to ‘service’. The general shift in terminology was emblematic of New Labour’s modernisation process. Labour’s 1999 Local Government Act included the Best Value regime for local authorities in England and Wales. Best Value was originally presented as a release from the Conservative’s that forced councils to submit selected services to compulsory competitive tendering. Unlike forcing competitive tendering for services economies, the Best Value initiative required local authorities, including fire authorities, to undertake Best Value reviews of their public service provision and to publish Best Value performance plans for their improvement. Best Value aimed to secure continuous improvements in public service delivery by the most economic, efficient and effective means available. The Government set out four defining elements of Best Value for local authorities (DETR, 1998)¹⁵:

1. To secure economic, efficient and effective services continuously (the ‘3 Es’).
2. Conduct service reviews within which the authority must demonstrate that in the fulfilment of their duties under Best Value they have: compared their service provision

¹⁴ Taylorism refers to a production efficiency methodology that breaks every action, job, or task into small and simple segments. Its aim is to improve efficiency in labour production. Its enduring nature in the fire service meant chains of staff were involved in procedures which protected roles and responsibilities to levels that countered efficiency.

¹⁵ DETR was the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. This became Department for Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) in 2001 and in 2002 transport moved to its own department and the remaining responsibilities of the DTLR became the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), which in 2005 became Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

with that of other private and public providers; consulted with local business and community; considered competition in provision; and challenged the reasons for, and methods of, provision (the '4 Cs').

3. Audit and measure performance, with the broad expectation that, year-on-year, costs would reduce and quality would increase. Performance would be monitored locally through Best Value Performance Reviews (BVPRs), partly through adherence to locally and statutorily determined Best Value performance indicators (BVPIs), and disseminated annually through Performance Plans (BVPPs).
4. Consequences of under-performance: Government intervention in cases of Best Value failure, and reward in cases of success.

Best Value policies and directives were intended to foster innovation and responsiveness and thereby promote continuous improvements in local service standards (DETR, 1998). The Best Value regime placed on local authorities a new duty to 'make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness' (DETR, 1998: para. 3.1). Under Best Value, councils and other statutory bodies such as police and fire authorities were required to develop a corporate strategy against which success can be measured; construct a programme of fundamental performance reviews; undertake performance reviews to examine the purpose of every function and the most effective means of procuring services; publish annual performance plans setting out strategies and targets for improvement and criteria for monitoring progress (Martin, 2002).

Soon after its implementation in the fire sector, the statutory framework was seen as centralising and standardising in its measurement and control of performance. Best Value introduced in a new system of external regulation intended to constrain the behaviour and performance of local authorities, principally through performance indicators, audit and inspection. The cost of delivering Best Value was unclear in relation to the service improvements it might actually deliver (Boyne 2000). Notwithstanding its inherent contradictions, the 1999 Local Government Act was designed to deliver service improvements across the public sector to the logic of the market, through centrally imposed performance indicators, monitoring and audit via the Best Value regime. It was the start of the quasi-marketisation of the public sector – towards efficiency (Ironside and Seifert, 2004). However, what was entrenched within the fire service cultural system that predated the 1999 Act defined how it impinged upon agents of the fire

service and its unions. Those entrenched cultures would therefore mediate their responses in return to the Act and to subsequent directives in the Government's drive to modernise the fire service. As well as FBU resistance and limited number of fire services submitting Best Value Reviews, the Chief Fire Officer's Association shared their concerns in their Best Value Policy Document (COA, 2001):

"It should be evident from this document that the Fire Officers' Association is not resistant to modernisation and change but we believe that it should be firmly based on evidence that effectiveness and value for public money can be improved. We are concerned that Government and its agencies might not always practice what they preach, and unless there is a clear demonstration of their commitment, Best Value is destined to fail. Confidence in the political process might be engendered were a long-term view of improvement (i.e. beyond the next electoral cycle) to be shown by political leaders. We also hold concerns over conflicting messages on who should determine the nature of the public services. On one hand we are told that our communities should dictate the balance between cost and quality, whilst on the other, Government imposes budgets and performance targets".

4.3.5 Best Value in control rooms? Ask the experts!

In respect of achieving Best Value in the fire service, the Home Office placed specific requirements on fire authorities to carry out reviews of defined activities in the first three years of their Best Value programme. In the first financial year (2000 to 2001), the functions of communications (emergency communications such as wide area radio) and control rooms were to be reviewed with the intention of making changes to achieve improvements in operating efficiency.

4.3.6 Control rooms at T¹

At T¹, a typical fire 'brigade' control room would respond to emergency calls from the public within the geographical boundaries served by the organisation. Control room staffing would follow the same system as that of operational fire crews in stations, e.g. a four days on / four days off routine creating an eight day 'tour of duty' cycle. Four different watches operated the shift system: red, white, blue and green. The system ensured control room (and fire cover) was maintained 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. If calls were received from outside the boundary, the incident would be passed to the relevant neighbouring brigade, usually via telephone or fax. If for any reason, a control room became unable to respond to emergency

calls, for example, due to a major telephony outage or threats to building safety, 999 calls would be diverted to another brigade based on disaster recovery arrangements with telephone providers and inter-brigade agreements of 'mutual assistance'.

Control rooms also dealt with many non-emergency inquiries and undertook numerous administrative tasks such as managing day-to-day fire station staffing/absences and coordinating issues with fire engine or equipment availability. Control room operators receiving 999 calls would begin the incident management process by creating an incident log. By asking a series of questions, the incident would be assessed, coded and geographically located. This would enable the incident to be matched to the nearest fire station resource. The resource would be mobilised using telephone lines that would leave the control room and arrive at the designated fire station where a series of electronic triggers would alert the crews to the fire. Control staff would maintain communication with the crew using vehicle based radios and would continue to update the incident log until they were advised by the officer in charge to close the log.

Control staff would also be responsible for engaging other agencies if an incident required support, for example, police and ambulance services. By the late 1990s, the process was computerised however, each brigade had its own software systems and leased its own wide area network for radio communications (Merseyside Fire Service Control Room Manager, 2011).

At the same time as fire authorities were reviewing control rooms and emergency communications for Best Value, the Home Office also commissioned the management consultants Mott MacDonald to undertake a Best Value review of control rooms in England and Wales. The following section delivers the key findings of a critical hermeneutic analysis of the report that followed the review.

Text 1: Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications in England & Wales, 2000.

4.4 Findings of a critical hermeneutic analysis; the efficiency imperative

For ease of reading, only page references are used in this section. All page references unless otherwise cited relate to the first-analysed text (The Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications in England and Wales, Mott McDonald, 2000). This is the first of the three definitive reports used by the Labour Government as evidence to legislate for control room

reforms to the fire service in 2004. Mott MacDonald were awarded the contract for the study on 6 December 1999 and their report was published April 2000. The report recommended the rationalisation of 47 control rooms to 21. The report recommended that “fire authorities work together to eliminate control rooms such that none handles less than 20,000 per year” (p.123).

This is one of four critical hermeneutic analyses embedded within the overall analytic framework of the morphogenetic sequence (T^1 - T^4). Each follows the four stage approach (Prasad, 2002, c.f. Chapter 3); *reading the text, laying out the context, closing the hermeneutic circle and forming the conceptual bridge to understanding*. The *contexts* for the texts have therefore already been laid out in the description of T^1 and subsequent texts analysed against the machinations of interactions between T^2 and T^3 are also considered as background to the interpretations. The following findings (for Text#1), result from reading and circling between the text and the T^1 contexts as different layers of understanding begin to emerge (Prasad’s stages 2 and 3). The conceptual bridge to understanding (stage 4), shall be incorporated in the Discussion, Chapter 5.

The 2000 Mott McDonald document is one of three successive Government-sponsored texts about reforming the fire service during Blair’s second Labour administration. The analysis shows how language was used to theorise how reform changes ought to be constructed. An early indication of this can be seen in Page 1 of the report where the Government’s brief was interpreted by the management consultants and mirrored back using the political language of the day. This would set the tone for the report throughout.

The terms of reference taken from the original consultants’ brief and contract (p.1), were:

- To provide authoritative advice for fire authorities and fire brigades on how best to meet their future mobile communications and control requirements
- To assess relative costs, benefits and risks available options for the provision of control rooms and mobile communications
- To identify criteria that should determine the choice of future mobile communications systems
- To advise how options should be implemented and to provide a timetable for doing this
- To provide practical assistance to fire brigades implementing the change
- To report to ministers by 31st March 2000.

Introducing the scope of the report that would deliver the findings of the work undertaken to deliver the brief (above), the management consultants immediately introduce the political policy language of Best Value and in doing so give salience to its merits without further justification. The scope of the report would:

- Identify the functions carried out by fire brigade control rooms in England and Wales
- Identify potential options for providing Best Value in the provision of fire control rooms
- Compare the options identified
- Provide advice for fire authorities on how best to achieve Best Value control room solutions,
- Identify potential barriers to implementation and recommend how these may be overcome
- Consider the implications for future fire service radio systems
- Develop an outline plan for implementing the report's recommendations (p.1).

The subtle jump from the Government brief (to help fire brigades *best meet* their future mobile and control requirements), to the consultants' claim that the report would provide advice on *how best to achieve Best Value* in control room solutions implies the latter is the solution to the former. Introduced in the 1999 Local Government Act, by the time of the report (April 2000), the espoused political value of the Best Value regime has been absorbed by the management consultants and becomes their objective in meeting the brief to find the best way for fire brigades to meet their future needs. "*As a result of the Best Value initiative, there will be increasing pressure on the emergency services to improve their operating efficiency*" (p.8). Ideologically, this first report about reforming control rooms reveals the emerging discourse of New Labour's early agenda for modernising the public sector. By linking Best Value to operating efficiency and then to meeting the future needs of control rooms, the management consultants are able to direct attention to the political conception of Best Value and efficiency, whilst concealing the fact that crucially, the review did not establish *inefficiencies* in control rooms. Key themes emerge in the report from which thematic references can be identified for the analysis (Prasad, 2002). They are based on themes of Best Value, efficiency and collaboration.

4.4.1 Constructing the requirement

The report lacks any preamble to its purpose. It moves straight into Terms of Reference and Scope (listed above) and provides a short précis of a series of historical Government reports that have made recommendations to improve various aspects the UK fire service. Any references to control rooms contained in the historical reviews (technology, operations and staffing), are extracted to support the report's aims, giving an impression that the current review builds from previous attempts to improve control rooms. However, amidst the 50 year potted history, only two reports specifically mention control room rationalisation. The first, *Mobilising Fire Service Resources* (1992), refers to procuring control room software solutions for managing resources at incidents. Based on information technology, the 1992 report suggests regional procurement of solutions would be more efficient. The second 'In the Line of Fire' is a management handbook (1995). It identifies opportunities for increasing value for money that might be achieved through inter-brigade collaboration. Fundamentally, the need for control room *operational* change per se, is not evidenced in these historic reviews; in fact the report admits that previous reports have only "*touched on fire service control rooms*" (p.7). Nevertheless, the report goes on to say, "*in spite of the substantial series of past reports and investigations into the fire service, there are still significant drivers for further change*" (p.7), as if the previous reports were specifically *about* control rooms. Notwithstanding this paucity of relevant control room investigation, the report suggests that

"Despite the fact that reforms have been recommended for at least a decade, there has been no significant change in the basic configuration of the fire service control rooms for at least a decade. This suggests that the methods used to promote change in the past have not been strong enough" (p.2).

The Introduction thereby creates the idea that previous attempts to reform control rooms had been ignored. Though unsubstantiated (see above), this helps the management consultants to develop the notion there is a control room problem that still needs solving. The report implies the problem (though undefined) now needs resolving. However, what the report promotes as new imperatives to reform essentially boil down to the new Government policies; *Best Value, joined up Government and regional governance* (p.7-8), as opposed to any operational dysfunction, per se.

Though it is typical that Government policies should drive reforms, the critical hermeneutic perspective highlights the report's lack of information to fully describe the control room

problem that the management consultants are ‘helping’ to resolve in light of new Government policy. The following table summarises the chapter where we might learn of the actual problem, by understanding the things that are driving the need for change. However, as can be seen from the summary table, the drivers relate to what were in fact New Labour’s latest Government policies. In reality, technology drivers could be achieved with improved procurement and drivers relating to Police and Ambulance were without substance.

Drivers for Change	Summary of driver
2.1 Government policy	[2.1.1] Best Value initiative; [2.1.2] Joined up Government; [2.1.3] Possible changes to local Government boundaries; [2.1.4] Experience from five recent major incidents, (<i>“All of these incidents involved the three main emergency authorities. It may be the case that operational benefits could have been achieved if these incidents were dealt with by a single joint Emergency Control Room. However, such benefits may also be achieved through the use of appropriate technology and a change in procedures”</i> (p.10)
2.2 Technology	[2.2.1] The need to implement new digital radio systems for fire-fighter communications (this is different to control room resource management systems) and the need to consider more efficient procurement of said technology; [2.2.2] The need to consider new ways of working in light of new technology, suggesting non-emergency calls could be managed through call centres to reduce calls into the emergency control room handling only 999s.
2.3 Fire-specific	[2.3.1] Home Office Policy (to encourage joint working within and with other organisations); [2.1.2] Regionalisation <i>“We [Mott MacDonald] have been told that the Home Office does not have any plans to regionalise the fire service. It does however believe that whilst the fire service is organised, provided and funded locally, there are some decisions about the provision of the fire service that are best made regionally or nationally”</i> (p.11)
2.4 Police	States that police are organised locally but have some aspects managed nationally (e.g. National Criminal Intelligence Service) and <i>“No plans to regionalise the police service have been announced although some senior officers have advocated rationalisation of the existing 43 forces into a smaller number or larger forces”</i> (p.11)
2.5 Ambulance	<i>“The department of health appear to be content to let amalgamation of ambulance trusts to be driven at least in part by commercial pressures”</i> (p.11)

Table 5 Drivers for change (based on Chapter 2. of ‘The future of fire service control rooms and communications in England and Wales’, Mott MacDonald, 2000)

The point of exploring this issue, is that had previous attempts to reform control rooms been ignored (as the management consultants suggested from the outset, see earlier), unresolved problems would have prevailed in fire control rooms. The problems may have related to control room operational inefficiency or to public safety and ineffective 999-call management, or to fire fighter safety in despatching to emergency incidents, for example. No such ‘drivers’ for change are mentioned. What is provided is a political agenda to reform control rooms to meet new Government policy requirements. Whilst this may not be unusual, the findings of the text analysis did not reveal any other reasons to reform other than those relating to Government initiatives. This will be explored further in the Discussion chapter but closing the hermeneutic circles reveals evidence of how this was achieved.

4.4.2 No significant changes to fire service in last decade?

Suggesting there had been ‘*no significant change*’ in fire service organisations for over a decade (p.2), set against the zeitgeist of Blair’s New Labour policy for modernising Britain, the apparent institutional resistance helps create the sense that the Mott MacDonald review was needed to move things on. However, in the absence of defining the meaning of the word ‘significant’, the report contradicts itself by highlighting a number of change projects (cases of potential shared service plans or active projects between fire and other emergency services), as part of the evidence to help shape future control rooms. These clearly evidence changes that were at least in serious planning stages in response to previous Government policies. The Discussion chapter will expand on this finding but in response to previous Government reviews that had *not* focused specifically on control rooms, evidence did exist that at least 17 fire services were considering or planning organisational collaborations, in efforts to improve efficiencies. If this ‘evidence’ was not significant in relation to sector changes, per se, why was it considered significant in the data collection stage to count as evidence for scoping recommendations for a national solution?

In its aim to arrive at a national solution (as opposed to the active locally/regionally managed solutions that were in various stages of development), the report goes on to discuss the high level options for (national) change and the associated issues for each. Further contradictions are revealed early on in the report. The management consultants briefly admit the paradox of

meeting the Government's brief to find a national solution, whilst striving to achieve Best Value in control rooms.

“One potential problem with the Best Value legislation, however, is that it applies to individual fire authorities, rather than to the fire service nationally. In this respect, it could be interpreted as being at variance with the Terms of Reference of this study” (p.8)

Yet, as if it is sufficient just to refer to it in the Introduction, the fundamental contradiction between these aims are never referred to again nor the obvious flaw in the process because of the incongruity. Despite the fact it would prove difficult to develop a national solution to deliver a locally managed policy (as Best Value was intended to be), Mott MacDonald continue to define the future of fire control room options, making the assumption that to achieve Best Value, there can only be four configurations for the future of fire service control rooms.

“The options for the future of fire service control rooms fall into the following categories: Fire-fire control room amalgamation; joint/shared services control rooms; several brigades sharing a common control room and two or more emergency services sharing a common control room” (p.91).

The hermeneutic circle of interpretation here again enables the text to be considered in the wider political context of New Labour's 'modernising Britain' discourse that was discussed in Section 4.3.2, relating to joined up working, collaboration and removing boundaries between organisations.

The imperatives for reform are described using New Labour discourse (e.g. shared services, joined up working). This infers that the solution to achieve future efficiency in control rooms would be to implement New Labour policies (thereby underpinning the relationship between political rhetoric and reform, which will be explored in Chapter 5).

4.4.3 Quality evidence?

Of course, the last point is not explicit in the report. Instead, the authors describe a comprehensive data collection method, which gives the impression that a solution, which was hitherto unknown, could be found from the review. Yet, in light of the Government's brief, that the management consultants would provide “*authoritative advice*” (p.S-1), for the future of control rooms in England and Wales, the quality of the data to inform that advice is less than adequate. In fact, the authors admit this at the very start of the report, when discussing the tight timescales set by the Home Office (three months to review all fire, police and ambulance

control rooms across England and Wales as well as a study of international control room examples);

“..evidence had to be gathered very quickly” (p.2)

And this;

“precluded many potentially fruitful approaches, including in particular, any gathering of evidence at first hand from control room models outside the UK” (p.2).

The timescales meant;

“..there were limited opportunities to verify evidence collected....some areas of statistical data that could not be verified but were critical to the potential conclusions” (p.2).

The management consultants explain how they substituted for these shortcomings by assembling their own *“Expert Panel comprising senior personnel from each emergency service and other experts in the field” (p.2)*. The expert panel would review the outputs of the study and check the *“soundness of the analytical process and validity of conclusions” (p.2)*. The expert panel consisted of five people; one police commander, one chief fire officer, one ambulance trust chief executive, the Chief Executive of the British Association of Public Communication Officers (BAPCO), and a police project manager. Although Mott MacDonald label the five as experts, their credentials in relation to assuring soundness of the analytical process and validity of conclusions are not evidenced. Perhaps feeling this was inadequate, the report offers the following;

“The consultants could not fail to be impressed by the dedication and knowledge of all contributors to the study” (p.2). Here the authors are drawing our attention to the ‘experts’ personal rather than professional attributes, emotively suggesting they worked tirelessly on our behalf, carrying the *“burden of listening to arguments..”* and *“correcting mis-interpretation of the evidence” (p.3)*. The latter statement suggests the process was scientific and helps to create the perception of research rigour, which in reality falls short in genuine research terms. It is from there, (a paragraph), without further reference to this obvious limitation to the data and the subsequent recommendations, that the expert panel substitution process was deemed sufficient. The ‘experts’ essentially negated the need for actual data collection and verification to the level that would be appropriate for such an influential Government review into the future requirements of control rooms.

The report goes on to provide three chapters of ‘data’; Chapter 3, “*Current Emergency Control Room Arrangements*” describes details of existing arrangements in police, fire and ambulance control rooms. Chapter 4, “*UK Case Studies*” details seven case studies of emergency service organisations in various stages of exploring or implementing changes through control room rationalisation. Chapter 5, “*International Experiences*” describes five collaborative control room arrangements in other countries. Recalling that the report was due in such a tight timescale that the authors said they had to collect evidence quickly and that precluded many potential fruitful approaches, including first-hand information gathering (p.2), the actual evidence that was collected was based on the three chapters outlined above (a summary of control rooms, seven UK cases of possible collaborations and five international control room collaborations). If these were the key sources of evidence, the following findings reveal the shortfalls.

4.4.4 UK evidence

Table 7 provides a summary of the UK case studies of organisations working on collaboration projects. At the time of the report, only the Welsh and Warwickshire changes had actually happened and these were due to locally managed governance (boundary) changes as opposed to fire service reforms. The other five cases were all in the planning stages. Each case was unique in its configuration; some were considering tri-service arrangements of police, fire and ambulance, others were between fire services. Some were hosting others and some were sharing sites. None was considering joint technology or ways of working. It is difficult to understand how any conclusions can be drawn, let alone generalised to future recommendations.

Collaborating organisations	Configuration	Government Scheme
Cleveland police, fire, ambulance services	Share a building but not equipment or operations	‘Invest to Save’ ¹⁶ pilot project (started 1999)
Gloucestershire police, fire, ambulance services	Share a building but not equipment or operations	‘Invest to Save’ pilot project (started 2000)

¹⁶ The Invest to Save Budget was introduced by the Government in 1999 to encourage partnership and cross-boundary working by Government departments; it was subsequently extended to local authorities and the NHS, National Archives; <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk>. Accessed 12/01/15

Wiltshire police, fire, ambulance services	Share a building and consider joint equipment or operations at later stage	'Invest to save' pilot project (started 2000)
North West Regional Control task group (fire)	5 NW counties (3 of which large urban conurbations, including 2 metropolitan brigades) exploring possible reorganisation to achieve Best Value looking at 5 configuration options	'Best Value' initiative (started 1999)
West Midlands Regional Initiative (fire)	Feasibility of regional initiative across 5 brigades	'Invest to Save' initiative (started 1999)
Brigade mergers in Wales (fire)	Previous merging of 8 authorities into 3 new entities (South, Mid & West and North wales Fire Services	Reorganisation completed in 1996 under local Government changes
Warwickshire fire/ambulance initiative	Fire service hosts ambulance control room/HQ onsite	1997 changes made based on locally managed decisions

Table 6. Summary of collaboration projects considered in the report.

4.4.5 International evidence

Data for international case studies of control rooms that had reformed to work with other same or different emergency services, was taken from published documentation or websites and in two of the five case studies telephone conversations were included with the Chief Fire Officers. However, based only on this table-top exercise, the report assumes the authority to provide “*an assessment of lessons to be learned from international experiences*” (p.2). Such conclusions can at best, be based only on the personal opinions of the management consultants and the five members of the ‘expert panel’ and the telephone conversations with one Chief Inspector (Toronto case study of shared emergency control room) and a Coordinator for International Relations (Netherlands case study of shared emergency services organisation). Limited numbers of geographically, demographically and culturally disparate case studies of collaboration (Vancouver/ Canada; Chicago/USA, Victoria/Australia; Drenth/Netherlands and Sweden), concluded that everywhere is different; “*control room arrangements implemented*

are strongly influenced by local circumstances and requirements” (p.89) and resistance to organisational changes is proportional to the extent of the change;

“Mistakes have been made where changes from the ‘status quo’ have been drastic (e.g. the private build, own, operate). There is evidence of less insurmountable problems where an incremental approach to change is adopted.” (p.90).

What stands out in the report are the conclusions the authors have drawn in relation to Barriers to Implementation (p.89), in these cases of various collaborations. Based on what can only be the telephone calls to a police inspector and an international relations manager (since the rest of the evidence was taken from published documents and there is no reference to academic research), the report states

“There is strong evidence of significant barriers to implementation in instances where control room functionality is combined. In general the most stubborn barriers are posed by cultural, organisational and ownership issues...” (p.89).

The report goes on to say:

“Labour relations (e.g. Paramedic Union involvement in Vancouver) have also presented significant barriers” (p.90), and, “Some ‘human issue’ barriers that have had to be overcome include: parochial self-interest; self-preservation of an identity; lack of desire to work with outsiders; stoical resistance to change; uncertainty, defensiveness and increased perception of threat” (p.90).

Closing the hermeneutic circle of interpretation in relation to how the authors selected ‘evidence’ for inclusion in the report, suggests they were reflecting the political mood around the time of this report. At T¹, FBU membership was high; 87% of uniformed staff (Redman and Snape, 2006), and the tripartite arrangement which gave Union leaders significant say in organisational change was embedded practice. The authors use strongly negative language to reveal only certain issues, whilst concealing (through omission) other issues or any counter perspectives from other stakeholders (since only two names are provided as live participants in the International case study reviews), and in doing so, reflect the mood of their New Labour commissioners. Labour’s stand on unions had been made firmly back in 1995, when Tony Blair as newly elected Party Leader said in his inaugural speech to the Labour Conference;

“We don’t want bosses versus workers, those are things of the past” (Blair, 1995).

Based on this limited ‘data’, we are presented with a chapter that discusses the high level options and issues for national reform. The chapter offers the various configurations that could work and provides an assessment of the options. From a hermeneutic perspective, the chapter mirrors the language of (and reflects), Blair’s New Labour politics, where modernisation, joined up Government, partnership and efficiency gains were key concepts (Fairclough, 2000).

“Barriers to implementation and restrictions on the potential for future joint/shared arrangements however encouraged a compromised approach in which optimum efficiency and economy was balanced by a realistic and achievable goal” (p.S-1);

“This would secure and maximise the realisable efficiency gains whilst enabling fire brigades to work effectively together” (p.S-4).

The language of New Labour was clearly demonstrated in the 1999 Local Government Act that had, for example, emphasised the need for inter-organisational collaboration at a strategic level, working closely with other local agencies to develop overarching community strategies. Best Value, which was enshrined in the LGA advocated internal joining up at a strategic level and external integration at an operational level (DETR, 1999).

4.4.6 Effective cost modelling?

If the data collection was inadequate from which to draw conclusions for a national solution, the Cost Model chapter also fell short in robust arguments to support it. The chapter begins with the line; *“The business case cost model has been designed in order to enable an informed financial decision to be made on the future of fire brigade control rooms”* (p.116). However, the cost model uses the *Erlang-C*¹⁷ model for calculating call centre headcount. Its application to call centres is expressed within the first few lines of the chapter, which explicitly links emergency control room reforms to call centre models of work. Interpreting this against the work trends in the period T¹, the ‘call centre’ organisation had been growing in number throughout the 1990s due mainly to their widespread adoption across the finance sector, with 60% of banks offering 24 hour call centre services by 1994 (Bain and Taylor, 2002). In call centres, customer and other telephone calls are handled in high volume using various information and communication technologies. In the context of the report written early 2000, call centres had diffused widely throughout the economy and were becoming the new

¹⁷ Erlang-C Model is a mathematical model commonly applied to predict queuing system behaviour in call centre applications (Robbins et al., 2010).

organisational model. Successes by the innovative First Direct (banking) and Direct Line (insurance) operations, established in 1989 and 1988 respectively as well as modern, customer-focused services offered by high profile companies like British Airways and British Telecom (Russell, 2008) were furthering their popularity. However, with rapidly growing numbers of call centres, the impact of conditions on workers were also beginning to emerge. The paradoxical objectives of transacting the maximum number of calls with the lowest staffing ratios, while aspiring to deliver customer satisfaction that retains and attracts new customers was beginning to be associated with significant working welfare issues (ibid). The focus on mass call processing that forces the shortening of job cycles and intensifies work processes (Bain and Taylor, 2000), was causing concerns.

In the Mott MacDonald report, the nature of *emergency* call handling had been described in detail across the three services. The report had described the very different systems in operation in police, fire and ambulance control rooms, with different routines. The unpredictability of emergency requirements (nature and state of an incident as well as caller disposition for example) compounds- the complexity of emergency control room work. However, whilst the report failed to justify the use of the generic call centre Erlang-C tool to model emergency control rooms, the authors nevertheless arrive at an optimal configuration that they say will achieve greatest efficiency, or in their words Best Value. Using the tool to plot a graph that “*demonstrates how savings increase as the threshold rises and the number of control rooms decrease*” (p.117), gives a very simple and apparently compelling picture for rationalisation, accompanied by confident claims:

“The key issues that flow from the model are;

- *There is clear efficiency gain as control rooms deal with larger numbers of incidents*
- *Annual cost savings of over £10 million are achievable*
- *Clear and unambiguous targets can be developed from the model to measure a Brigade’s performance once a benchmark is set*

Greater economies of scale can be expected in any calculation that divides a bigger number by smaller numbers. However, modelling one industry with tools from another did not account for any of the fire-specific complexity that existed. The findings suggest the use of such a tool may have been linked to New Labour’s intentions for modernising work forces with cheaper more flexible options as opposed to calculating accurate costs.

In justifying the claim that the maximum efficiency gains would be made if control rooms increase in size from 10,000 to 20,000 incidents per year (in relation to cost per 999 call) the range between the largest and the smallest control room was given as £20-30 and £40-50. Importantly, the cost modelling left out London from this range due to its unique size and remit, separately identifying their cost per incident at £15 per call. This assumption would change in the Mott MacDonald 2003 update report, 2.5 years later, rendering the range huge and more unequal. This change would support a different conclusion that will be described later in the third hermeneutic text analysis.

4.4.7 Summary of hermeneutic analysis text #1

The intention of this analysis was to interpret the text in relation to its context at increasingly higher levels to establish greater understanding of the original document (Prasad, 2002), and to explore “crucial dimensions of power, and specifically ideological deformation of language use” (Kinsella, 2006, p. 7). The hermeneutic analysis of the first of two fundamentally important management consultant reports, illuminated the ease with which Mott MacDonald constructed notions of a requirement for reform, efficiency and the idea of their expertise in conducting the review to deliver authoritative advice. Expertise was deemed sufficient, and the review and its report proceeded without the views of any fire service staff in relation to meeting their future needs. Mott McDonald were able to admit to the pressure of, but not be hindered by political timescales that prevented the collection of sufficient data to support reforms. This demonstrates the ease with which management consultants, hired by Government ministers under their own political time pressures, are seemingly able to mitigate the otherwise significant limitation of data quality by labelling a group of five disparate public sector staff an ‘expert panel’. The findings also highlighted the adoption of New Labour discourse (joined-up, collaboration, best value), in describing solutions to achieving greater efficiency, yet the report lacks the necessary evidence trail to underpin such claims. The report fails to define efficiency, inefficiency, or the political concepts that would provide resolutions, such as Best Value. Yet, despite these shortcomings the report is able to recommend a national solution to rationalise the number of control rooms from 49 to 21 that would best meet the future needs of the fire service in England and Wales.

4.5 FBU throws down the gauntlet: the 2002 40% pay claim

The process of collective bargaining, then characteristic of the fire service’s nationally indexed pay formulae, had provided significant benefits to its members. The scheme had generally led

to automatic, formulaic increases and management-union negotiated conditions of service (Corby, 2003). However, by the beginning of the new decade the benefits of the pay scheme began to break down due to its rigid procedures high rates of inflation. There was cause for concern as firefighter pay had started to fall behind other skilled worker rates and this started to unsettle unions (Ironside and Seifert 2005). During the latter part of the decade preceding T¹, industrial relations had been deteriorating. This took the form of local fire brigade disputes (Berkshire 1999; Derbyshire 1995/6; Essex 1997/1998; Merseyside 1995, 2001). Disputes came in response to growing tensions around pay and conditions. By the late 1990s “disquiet was being vociferously expressed by rank and file delegates at FBU conferences” (Serfiet and Sibley, 2011, p.337). Following the election of the second Blair Government in 2001, the FBU leadership was ready to build a new pay claim and at their 2002 conference debated an emergency resolution;

“The fire service national pay formula [has become] less effective at delivering a reasonable living wage to those who render a vital emergency service to our communities. Simultaneously the jobs of firefighters and emergency control staff have become increasingly complex and skilled and this should be reflected in their wages” (FBU, 2002, p.97)”

By 2002, New Labour was settling into its second Government administration and the modernisation agenda in one form or another was taking shape across public sector institutions, such as education and health. The 1997 Excellence in Schools White Paper (DfE, 1997), had legislated for changes in terms pupil attainment and school performance standards that were now in place and operating. Healthcare reforms such as NHS Direct (1998), and healthcare regulator, National Institute for Clinical Excellence (1999), were by now, embedded in organisational structures and processes. Such reforms were changing roles, structures and pay levels in those sectors. For example, Prime Minister Blair was beginning to signal for above-inflation pay rises for all nurses, with the biggest increases for those at the top of their profession (Blair 2002). In August 2002, the Government announced that teachers' pay would, for the first time be linked to test results or pupils' behaviour (The Guardian, 2002). It is around this time, (of national discussions and developments in other public sector roles and salary structures and the effects of attempts to modernise through Best Value), that strains between the FBU and the local authority employers begin to emerge in relation to pay. In Archer's (1995), terms, a disjunction was developing within the strong tripartite arrangement and tension was brewing.

4.6 Divergent interests

At the end of the structural conditioning phase (T¹), there begins a departure in the nature of relations between the FBU, the local authority employers and the fire service management. In morphogenetic terms, organisational relations that had been necessary, interdependent and complementary, and where everyone's vested interests were being served to a greater (or at least acceptable) extent, were changing; interests were diverging. *What was changing?*

4.7 A brief history of the Labour Party

The Labour Party was created in 1900. It was formed collaboratively by working people, trade unionists and socialists. The party website states that Labour Party is united by the goal of changing the British Parliament to represent the interests of everybody, not just the affluent (Labour Party, n.d.). Labour was the party of the working classes and for the next one hundred years the Labour-union alliance would serve to be mutually beneficial to its key stakeholders; unions and their working members provided mass membership, finance and organisation to the party and in return were assured of working-class political representation and advocacy of working-class and trade union interests (Davies, 1996).

As the century progressed, the extensive increases in public services in post war Britain that had enabled working class people to enjoy some voice through their trade unions in the direction of state policy had as a result, enabled the unions to grow powerful. However, a sea change occurred (itself the result of morphogenesis) in the aftermath of Labour's fourth successive general election defeat in 1993 when Tony Blair was elected as leader of the Labour Party in 1994 (Harmer, 2014). It was at this juncture that changes to the traditional Labour Party rhetoric, internal party organisation and policies became evident. The ideological drift was manifest in Labour's 1997 General Election victory speech at which Blair's 'fairness not favours' line demonstrated the tone of their winning manifesto that contained few commitments to union-related issues, typically stalwart Labour material (Fairclough, 2000). During the 1996 Labour Party conference in Blackpool, Tony Blair claimed he had turned Labour into a party that was 'pro-business and pro-enterprise' (Blair, 96). Blair's 'Third Way' philosophy of New Labour, New Britain and the associated rhetoric of modernisation and change, had been inspired not only by US President Clinton's new democrats (Section 4.3.2), but philosophically by sociologist Anthony Giddens (Neocleous, 1996). Giddens (1998), argued that a series of social revolutions, including globalisation, individualisation and de-traditionalisation, had transformed matters in ways that meant traditional right and left approaches to Government were now inappropriate. After the 1997 victory, Blair's and Clinton's Governments

collaborated to organise the Third Way conference at New York University where both leaders spoke (Jaenicke, 2000). Blair's influences are evident in his speech at the conference. For example;

"The Third Way is not an attempt to split the difference between right and left. It is about traditional values in a changed world. And it draws vitality from uniting the two great streams of left-of-centre thought - democratic socialism and liberalism - whose divorce this century did so much to weaken progressive politics across the West. Liberals asserted the primacy of individual liberty in the market economy; social democrats promoted social justice with the state as its main agent. There is no necessary conflict between the two, accepting as we now do that state power is one means to achieve our goals, but not the only one and emphatically not an end in itself". (Blair, 1997 in Coates and Lawler, 2000)

The Blair Government was shifting its ideological position towards a pro-business image, abandoning policies grounded in old Labour ideologies in line with other global social democrat leaders of the post-Soviet Union era, such as George Clinton and Germany's Gerhard Schroeder (Schafer and Walker, 2006).

To reach wider audiences effectively, the new democratic leaders of Blair's Labour Party courted the media and in so doing became effectively autonomous from the trade unions and political activist base of their parties (Seifert & Sibley, 2011). Though the FBU saw itself as a fundamental part of the backbone of the Labour Party, advocating the rights of workers, the Blair Government had totally reassessed the role of the labour movement in state governance (Crouch and Streeck 2006).

Blair as leader of the New Labour party was now publically distancing himself from the unions and was instead pursuing a new democratic, pro-business image. The seeds of divergence from old union allegiances is captured in excerpts from two BBC televised interviews from the 1997 British General Election, Jeremy Paxman (JP) and Peter Sissons (PS) question Tony Blair (TB):

(JP) "Do you still consider yourself a socialist?"

(TB) "I do in the sense of the values; I don't share the idea that socialism's about some fixed economic prescription".

(PS) *“If Labour wins on Thursday it’s a fourth victory for Margaret Thatcher, she said she’d bury socialism, you’ve completed that for her, you left all the principal landmarks she created in place”.*

(TB) *“No I wouldn’t agree with that at all. What I think is sensible however is that the Labour Party wants to take the country forward and it is New Labour and we don’t want battles over public versus private sector, bosses versus workers, those are things of the past.”* (Bull, 2000).

4.8 Summary and morphogenetic perspective at T¹

T¹ represents the structural and cultural conditioning that results from prior to social and socio-cultural interaction. At this time, the New Labour party was bedding in with its new Third Way values and politics, representing a significant departure from traditional Labour thinking and practices and reflecting the conditioning of previous administrations and the diffusion of new democratic politics that had been spreading in parts of Europe and in America. The fire service, on the other hand, had been conditioned by years of morphostasis, where the vested interests of existing institutions had been protected and reproduced for decades. The coming together of the New Labour Government and the old fire service institution, to undergo structural reform policies (as first attempted by the Best Value initiative), resulted in divergent interests and asymmetrical relations. In morphogenetic terms. The consequences of these asymmetrical relations derived from unequal power emerging between the FBU and the New Labour Party ideology. The FBU held power from previous cycles but Labour was the new party; their power to change structures and cultures using only policy initiatives was not strong enough.

As the FBU were calling for pay increases and equity, the Government were promoting New Labour thinking that lacked the traditional allegiance with left-wing politics of the FBU. The New Labour Government were instead calling for improved performativity and efficiency through their modernisation agenda. Disjunction developed as the contest began between the new Government’s mantras of modernisation, Best Value and efficiency, and the traditional structures and cultures of the fire service.

In Archer’s (1995), morphogenetic terms (see shaded columns in Table 2 below), the situational logics, once *necessary* and *compatible*, resulting in *protectionism*, were now shifting. Relations between the local Government employers (taking directives from central Government) and the fire service (represented by the FBU) remained necessary but were becoming *incompatible*. The resulting situational logics were now calling for change, for *correction* of the necessary

complementarities within the fire service structural system. The institutionally dominant FBU were confronted by the emergence of competitive contradictions as New Labour posed cultural alternatives in relation to their ideas of Best Value and efficiency that would challenge the routinized behaviours in the fire service.

	Contradictions		Complementarities	
	Necessary	Contingent	Necessary	Contingent
Situational logic	correction	elimination	protection	opportunism
CEPs of: Cultural system Socio-cultural interaction	<i>syncretism</i>	<i>pluralism</i>	<i>systematisation</i>	<i>specialisation</i>
	unification	cleavage	reproduction	sectionalism
SEPs of: Structural system Social interaction	<i>compromise</i>	<i>competition</i>	<i>integration</i>	<i>differentiation</i>
	containment	polarisation	solidarity	diversification

Table 2 summary of structural morphogenesis/morphostasis (adapted from Archer, 1995, p.303); CEP: cultural emergent properties; SEP: structural emergent properties.

Whilst major structural change was not occurring at T¹ under the Best Value initiative, signs of *compromise* were apparent as fire services complied with new regulations to implement Best Value performance indicators. Whilst the new situational logic of *correction* stemming from the contradictions of New Labour and old fire service, was not delivering service-wide cultural reform, cultural *syncretism* was evident in the socio-cultural interactions between the fire service and the Best Value process. Syncretism occurs when an organisation (e.g. the fire service) sinks its differences, and to some extent displays *unification* with the aspects of change (Archer, 1995). This was the case in the fire service response to Best Value and joined-up working, as, for example, the various Best Value collaboration projects began feasibility studies (c.f Table 6, Section 4.4.4; Summary of fire service collaboration projects). However, Best Value auditors were finding evidence that changes were superficial. This excerpt is taken from a Scottish audit report published in December, 2001, three years after Best Value was introduced to local Governments;

“About half the councils and two fifths of audited services had a good number of the elements for effective performance management in place....However, a third of councils and almost half of services were still some way behind”....

“First there must be clear recognition that Best Value requires a culture change. There must be clear active and sustained leadership from senior managers and elected members

to ensure that Best Value is fully integrated. Best value must be promoted as a way of working to improve services rather than an end in itself” (Audit Commission, 2001, p.33).

At T¹, the new policy changes associated with performance and doing more for less, also brought the frustrations of the rumbling pay issues to the surface. The FBU’s 40% pay claim in 2002 marks the point at which interests began to diverge between the fire service and the Government. Notwithstanding the element of subjectivity in selection of ‘evidence’ for the research, the structural and cultural conditioning that was shaping the situations at T¹ may not have determined but certainly predisposed people to take up certain courses of action (Archer, 1995).

In the next section, the effects of those structural conditioning forces described in the period designated T¹, will be revealed through a description of interactions. In this morphogenetic sequence, these interactions ultimately led to organisational elaboration at T⁴. The interactions between the structures and cultures (parts), and the people, would result in further shifts of situational logics (between T² and T³), until significant structural changes resulted. The power by which this was effected will be discussed in Chapter 6.

4.9 T² – T³ Socio-Cultural Interaction: situational logics 2000 to 2003

4.9.0 Introduction

The research asks if our usual source of understanding the failure of FiReControl (PAC), was sufficient or if there are alternative places to look for causal mechanisms that may contribute to the failure, such as cultural, structural and/or agential influences. Thus far, the analysis of early attempts to reform the fire service has centred on the Best Value modernisation efforts of the New Labour Government following the Local Government Act (1999). However, the fire service did not undergo any notable cultural or structural morphogenesis. The Labour Government's 1999 Act and its Best Value regime, though statutory did not instigate significant changes to structure nor to culture. Not only was the FBU dominant in its power to protect its vested interests but the Government and the Home Office did not individually, or collectively, provide a coherent strategy to attain the holy grail of efficiency through Best Value. Indeed, the tendency to portray Best Value as a decisive strategy for change was misleading as was found in the analysis of the 2000 Mott MacDonald Report at T¹. The link between Best Value and the achievement of 'efficiency' was not made clear by the Government, nor was the evidence trail for the claims that the former would deliver the latter.

4.9.1 Reinventing 'the Department'; *reinventing John Prescott?*

The Home Office had been responsible for the ministerial conditioning of the UK fire service at the end of T¹. In 2001, the fire service moved into a new ministry, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The influence of the ODPM would eventually contribute to the structural morphogenesis of the fire service.

The ODPM had a complicated and relatively short life. It was formed as part of the Home Office in 2001 and reformed to become the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), in 2006. Yet by standards of other offices it was a significant element of the New Labour Government. Previously known as the Department of the Environment when Labour came to power in 1997, it was merged with the transport department to form the huge Department for Transport, Environment and the Regions (DETR). Then, in 2001, the DETR lost its environment team to a newly merged ministry with agriculture, and became the equally huge Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, under Stephen Byers. In the aftermath of the resignation of Stephen Byers, following controversies relating to Railtrack (The Guardian, 28 May, 2002), and the Potters Bar rail crash (The Telegraph, 13th May, 2002),

a new Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), was created and headed by the Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott. The ODPM assumed responsibility for local Government, including fire brigades, the regions, housing and planning, with transport moved into a separate department. The size of the ODPM was considerable in comparison to other departments, employing more than 6,000 staff with a budget of around £50 billion. The ODPM's mission was to create "Sustainable Communities". In the period relating to the unit of analysis (1999 to 2004), the National Archives (2006), show the ODPM's critical programmes for that remit were:

- Improving regional arrangements to maximise the effectiveness of planning and investment
- Supporting robust local Government finance; securing a strategic role for local Government
- Delivering the Thames Gateway programme as a cross-Government project
- Modernisation of the Fire and Rescue Service.

The National Archives (2006), also show the Fire and Resilience Directorate as a sub-department in the ODPM, tasked with the modernisation of the fire and rescue service through three key projects;

- *FiReControl*: to regionalise the fire service command and control function (the case for this research),
- *FireLink*: to deliver a national voice and data system that would join up hitherto independent and disparate fire service radio communications,
- *New Dimensions*: to deploy equipment, training and standardised procedures to deal with terrorist attacks and major environmental disasters.

4.9.2 Prescott's vision: decentralism, regional governance

As well as the modernisation of the fire service programme, another of the ODPM's critical programmes was of causal import to the research case; 'Improving regional arrangements to maximise the effectiveness of planning and investment at this level'. This programme was a fundamental link to the eventual FiReControl reform project. The motivation for regionalism reflects the traditional Labour Party commitment to the concept of redistributing wealth via 'centralism' (where economic planning is reshaped through central control as a means of

redistribution or equalisation (Labour Party website.). Regionalisation is considered by Labour Governments as a “technocratically efficient means to that end”, (Sandford, 2005, p.109).

John Prescott’s work on regional Government went way back before he headed up the regional agenda at the ODPM. In 1982, under the old Labour leadership of Neil Kinnock, the then Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, John Prescott MP, published the Alternative Regional Strategies and in 1994 he set up the Regional Policy Commission to develop regional policy. Later on under Tony Blair’s leadership, Prescott authored elements of New Labour’s 1997 General Election Manifesto, which pledged to introduce directly elected regional Governments. In a DETR press release in 1997, Prescott suggested the economic benefits of regional Government in regions that had suffered “huge disadvantages over the years”. Prescott asserted that it was “absolutely vital that we give the regions the tools to do the job themselves”. Prescott promised policy would be driven by “five key priorities -integration, de-centralisation, regeneration, partnership and sustainability” and assured the regions that the Blair Government would “not be dictating rigid prescriptive formulae from the centre. Innovation and flexibility will be encouraged at all times” (DETR, 1997, pp. 1-2).

Prescott’s perspective on regionalism differed politically to the original manifesto view for regionalism put forward in 1997 by Jack Straw who had focused on the democratic benefits of regional Government. When Labour won in 1997, Prescott’s version was more popular amongst Labour’s senior ministers and in 1998, eight Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were born of his mega ministry, the Department of Transport and the Regions (Harrison, 2006). Giving Prescott freedom to develop the RDAs has been portrayed as a “sop to English regionalism, to make up for the Government’s unwillingness to progress with elected assemblies” (Sandford, 2005, p.109). It was suggested that Blair and Brown saw Prescott’s RDAs as “innovations in their overall political economic strategy” (Harrison, 2006, p.14), whilst Prescott viewed them as a fundamental element of a grand governance plan. Though regional assemblies had been promised in Labour’s 1997 election manifesto, despite Prescott’s ardent advocacy and commitment, they were continually subject to lack of support throughout the party ranks and the regions. By 2000, a report by the Cabinet Office, called ‘Reaching Out’, heavily criticised the Government’s regional policy when it suggested better co-ordination was needed between ministers and within Whitehall to make policy for the regions work. It said: *"The clear evidence from those on the ground is that there are too many Government initiatives,*

causing confusion; not enough co-ordination; and too much time spent on negotiating the system, rather than delivering." (Cabinet Office 2000, p.4).

Prescott responded by announcing a new Regional Co-ordination Unit to oversee the delivery of Government departments' initiatives across England. Blair did little to defend the failings, instead writing in the Introduction to the 'Reaching Out' report, said that it

"...shows that too many good projects are having to waste time negotiating their way through complex systems of unnecessary red tape. The report recommends a stronger role for Government offices in the regions in pulling together the different arms of central Government; new arrangements in Whitehall; and new mechanisms to streamline the variety of different funding streams, initiatives and arrangements. The Government has accepted these conclusions. Our aim is now to implement those proposals in ways which can support departments in delivering their key objectives, and which will improve the coherence of national departmental policies delivered locally." (Blair, 2000, p.4)

In the next election manifesto in 2001 and Labour was again promoting regionalism, claiming that some Government functions were best tackled at the regional level and it remained a commitment for the party to achieve this.

"Some functions are best tackled at the regional level. Economic development is the core of regional policy today. In our first term, we have created RDAs to drive economic development.... We are committed, as RDAs take on more power, to enhance the scrutiny functions of regional chambers".

The manifesto suggested some regions would be satisfied with enhanced scrutiny functions but in others.. *"there may be a stronger sense of regional identity and a desire for a regional political voice"* (Labour Party Manifesto, 2001).

Regionalisation and elected assemblies were never really presented as high profile policies, instead being merely discussed through policy documents and proposals very much in the shadows of the 'big' New Labour election issues, such as public sector reform (Sandford 2005, p.104). The devolution that had occurred in Scotland and Wales in the early part of Labour's first term in office had heralded a new era for England's regional Government agenda, the beliefs surrounding how Government is structured in New Labour's Third Way approach

ultimately would influence the success of regional Government and the desire by some powerful agents to make something fit into the regional vacuum created.

John Prescott was, and remained until his retirement in 2010 (c.f. Prescott, 2008), a staunch advocate of regionalism and regional governance. Despite his advocacy of regional Government, in the end, regional assemblies failed to be realised after the crushing defeat of the idea at a referendum in the North East in 2004. The Yes campaign (to implement a regional assembly), was supported by the region's Labour political establishment, but it was defeated by a campaign that concentrated on the perceived wastefulness of a regional tier of Government reported to cost £25 million a year to run which was covered by national press (Johnston, 2004). In the wake of the defeat the policy was abandoned and the ODPM sought instead to pursue alternative decentralisation strategies, such as new governance for neighbourhoods and revitalization of local Government (Sandford, 2005, p.66).

Despite its failure to implement regional assemblies, the structures, cultures and agency of the ODPM and Prescott between T² and T³ would feature heavily in the morphogenesis of the fire service at T⁴. The next section continues the analysis from September 11th 2001 when a single event would not only alter the western psyche but would bring firefighting sharply into national focus.

4.9.3 Firefighting in the global spotlight; the terrorist attacks of 9/11

On September 11, 2001 (9/11), a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks were carried out in the United States on buildings in New York City and Washington, D.C. Four passenger airliners were hijacked by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda and flown into the North and South towers of the World Trade Centre and into a Pentagon building. The New York Times reported that the attacks killed over 2,750 people and caused at least \$10 billion in property and infrastructure damage (Dunlap, 2008). 414 of the dead were emergency workers in New York City who responded to the attack and of these, 341 were firefighters and two were paramedics from the New York City Fire Department (Grady and Revkin, 2002).

The attacks had a profound global impact and changed public expectation of emergency service response capability. In the UK, the event significantly affected thinking around how the emergency services would respond to catastrophic, multiple and sustained incidents on a scale now envisaged after 9/11. The 9/11 attacks made the scale and scope of multiple and simultaneous terrorism a reality and introduced a new concept of being permanently prepared

for sustained response to unprecedented and unanticipated occurrences (Mott. MacDonald, 2003, p.8). A direct UK Government response to 9/11 was the Civil Contingencies Capabilities Programme. Specifically for the fire service, the New Dimension programme issued specialist equipment, procedures and support mechanisms to all UK fire and rescue services to improve resilience and preparedness to civil contingencies and large-scale catastrophic incidents.

4.9.4 Pay talks break down; all-out strike, deadlock..

By 2002, with a new post 9/11 heightened state of emergency, the relatively new ODPM with its vast political remit, was dealing with matters ranging from local Government reform, English devolution and transport policies, to overhauling the 1948 Civil Defence Act. On-going updates to the 1948 Act, which became the Draft Civil Contingencies Bill (passed in 2003 and finally the Civil Contingencies Act, 2004), aimed to ensure first responders such as fire and police could cope in the event of domestic threats to services (as seen in the fuel protests, mass flooding of 2000, and the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001) and terrorist attacks. In light of 9/11, the meaning of emergency was re-defined with clause (c);

(1) In this Part “emergency” means—

(a) an event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare in the United Kingdom or in a Part or region,

(b) an event or situation which threatens serious damage to the environment of the United Kingdom or of a Part or region, or

(c) war, or terrorism, which threatens serious damage to the security of the United Kingdom. (Civil Contingencies Act, 2004 c 36)

By May, 2002, the on-going dispute between the fire brigades’ local authority employers and the FBU that had led to the 40% pay claim (discussed at T¹). The FBU wanted a modernised reward package for its members based on notions of equality and recompense for skills upgrading which related both to the changing nature of the job and increased productivity (Seifert and Sibley, 2011). A confidential report obtained by the Guardian newspaper reported that fire authority leaders had already proposed a 16.1% rise in July to avoid damaging strikes, but ministers refused to fund the deal (Maguire and Wintour, 2002). By late summer, industrial relations were at an all-time low. The new terrorist threat and talk of troop deployment to Iraq, heightened tensions around the FBU’s threat of all-out national strike action as the contingency plans required the army and Green Goddess vehicles as fire cover.

This stage in the ‘story’ of this case represents an important juncture. In brief, the events surrounding 9/11 and the timing of the FBU pay dispute, highlighted the tensions between the FBU, the fire service and its employers, due to power changes that will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5. In the aftermath of 9/11, Blair began to talk of a ‘war on terror’ and the rhetoric served to highlight a new crisis of national security. Speaking at The Lord Mayors banquet (2001), Blair had said:

“The war against terrorism is not just a police action to root out the networks and those who protect them, although it is certainly that. It needs to be a series of political actions designed to remove the conditions under which such acts of evil can flourish and be tolerated. The dragon's teeth are planted in the fertile soil of wrongs unrighted, of disputes left to fester for years or even decades, of failed states, of poverty and deprivation”

And..

“Above all, I know the British people recognise the link between what happens in the outside world and what happens on our own streets in Britain. The 11th September was an attack on us all. Defeating those responsible is essential to our security; to economic confidence, so badly hit by terrorism; to the stability of our society, from the reduction of external threats down to the drugs trade - 90% of the heroin in Britain originating in Afghanistan (Blair, 2001).

The links between national security and the fire service had never been so apparent. The death toll of fire fighters after the terrorist attacks exposed the vulnerability of emergency workers and civilians. The growing pay crisis in the UK fire service would now present a hugely significant political element for the Blair Government. The symbolism of the confrontation between the Labour Party and the FBU, was not only challenging the long established legacy of the Labour-union alliance (Pyper, 2003), but challenging the capacity of Blair’s new party. New Labour was in the global spotlight as the key ally for the US to address the significant issue of national security.

4.9.5 Morphogenetic perspective

From a morphogenetic perspective, at this stage, (mid-way between T² and T³- 2001/2), the start of another a shift in organisational relations occurs as a test of power between New Labour and FBU begins.

Around 2000, Government attempts to reform the fire service with the Best Value initiative had disrupted prevailing *protectionist* logics of previous cycles where *necessary* and *complementary* relations had reproduced structures and cultures for decades. However, at the end of T¹, beginning of T², though necessary, organisational relations (between fire service and Government), became incompatible (*necessary incompatibilities*). At the social-interaction level, the fire service *contained* its actions and complied with the *correction* logic (around Best Value changes), but significant structural or cultural change did not follow, as was found at T¹. However, by 2001, as the 40% pay claim continued to be met with derision and rejection (see Section 4.6), interests were diverging and nation-wide fire service strikes were getting under way. Moreover, in response to 9/11, Britain and the US had sent troops to Iraq and the army was being stretched to provide cover for the fire service. Relations were strained, showing signs of becoming in morphogenetic terms, *contingent contradictions* (see Table 2 below). Neither the FBU nor the Government appeared willing to *compromise*.

	Contradictions		Complementarities	
	Necessary	Contingent	Necessary	Contingent
Situational logic	correction	elimination	protection	opportunism
CEPS of: <i>Cultural system</i> Socio-cultural interaction	<i>syncretism</i>	<i>pluralism</i>	<i>systematisation</i>	<i>specialisation</i>
	unification	cleavage	reproduction	sectionalism
SEPs of: <i>Structural system</i> Social interaction	<i>compromise</i>	<i>competition</i>	<i>integration</i>	<i>differentiation</i>
	containment	polarisation	solidarity	diversification

Table 2 summary of structural morphogenesis/morphostasis (adapted from Archer, 1995, p.303); CEP: cultural emergent properties; SEP: structural emergent properties.

The shading in Table 2 indicates the oscillation between situational logics that appeared to occur in this phase (T² to T³), as the Government involved itself in the dispute. During the morphogenetic sequence time frame (1999 to 2004), responsibility for negotiating firefighters' pay lay with the *local* Government employers. Before the Government interjected, the employers met regularly with the FBU^{18,19} to discuss a settlement between the original 40% pay claim of 28th May and 2nd September 2002. That initial period of negotiation ended with

¹⁸ Fire talks continue 04 November 2002. www.fbu.org.uk Accessed 07/12/15

¹⁹ Firefighters threaten first national strike in 25 years 16 May 2002.

<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2002/may/16/localgovfinance.localGovernment> Accessed 07/12/2015

an offer of 4% and unsurprisingly the FBU executive subsequently rejected the offer on 2nd September²⁰. In morphogenetic terms, that date is important because here, social interactions between the FBU and Government appeared to be following strategies of *containment*. After pay talks broke down, the emergent properties of the relations that ensued following these unyielding interactions, John Prescott intervened. He announced the establishment of an independent review of the fire service, alleging it to be on behalf of the fire service employers. This suggested new situational logics of *compromise*. The apparent intention was to assist local employers in their decision making to arrive at a pay settlement. Discussing the issue in the House of Commons October 22, 2002, John Prescott said;

“On 2 September, the employers offered the FBU a 4 per cent. increase, plus an agreement to establish a new formula that would link increases in firefighters' pay to increases in the economy in general. The employers also invited the FBU to join them in asking for an independent review to be established. They also gave an undertaking that any increase in pay agreed by the review would be backdated to the 7 November pay settlement date. By any standards that was a reasonable offer. Nonetheless, the FBU rejected it.

It became clear that there was no prospect of a solution being found through the normal negotiating process. The employers made it clear that the negotiations had broken down, and requested a Government review. In those circumstances, the House will recognise that the Government could not stand aside. Fire disputes are different from most disputes. People's lives are put at risk and the Government have a responsibility to secure people's safety. So we acted quickly and decisively.

On 5 September, just three days after negotiations broke down—and after consultations—we set up an independent review” (Prescott, 2002).

The ODPM issued the following press release, 5th September 2002

FIRE SERVICE MINISTER ANNOUNCES INDEPENDENT REVIEW ON THE FIRE SERVICE

²⁰ “FBU reject employers pay offer”, letter to FBU members, Mick Shaw, Executive Council Member for London Fire Brigades' Union, 12th September, 2002. Accessed 05/07/2015

The Fire Service Minister, Nick Raynsford, announced today that the Government is launching an independent review of the Fire Service. The review will be conducted by Professor Sir George Bain.

Nick Raynsford said:

“We all greatly value the contribution that Fire Service staff make to public safety. They are rightly held in high regard for their professionalism and dedication. This independent review will be an excellent opportunity to consider the issues facing the Fire Service, including pay. I am delighted to say that Professor Sir George Bain has agreed to conduct the review. This review provides an alternative to what would be unnecessary and deeply damaging industrial action. There is no time to lose and I hope that the review will start and report its findings as soon as possible, allowing for the necessary consultation and consideration of what are some difficult and complex issues. All parties will be given the opportunity to submit evidence and to participate in the review” (ODPM, 2002).

The Independent Review of the Fire Service (IRFS), and the subsequent report, would mark an important turning point in the process that resulted in the FiReControl reform project to regionalise the fire service. The IRFS report (2002), became one of the most important documents in the modernisation of the fire service (Matheson et. al, 2011), and is the subject of the second critical hermeneutic analysis for this study. (The findings will be discussed next in Section 4.10).

Whilst the move to commission the IRFS not only bought Labour time, it would also ensure the interests of Blair’s vision for modernisation were protected. The timing of the announcement of the review (5th September), made within 48 hours of talks ending on the 3rd, suggested it had been a premeditated decision to seize the pay opportunity to further the reform objectives.

The FBU refused to take part in the review, rejecting the report as trotting out a ‘tired, old agenda’ and of being part of a ‘derisory and insulting’ offer (BBC News, 2002). Instead, the FBU balloted its members in October 2002 and as was reported in The Telegraph, 87% voted in favour of industrial action (Laville and Brogan, 2002), giving the fire service the facility to threaten strike action, to encourage the employers to demand more central resources to raise wages and the level of services to the public. On the eve of the first 48 hour strike 12th

November, Mick Shaw, Executive Council Member for London FBU wrote to all Union members about rejecting the 12% pay offer and the subsequent action. He said:

“The blame for the breakdown of talks and for the second national strike in the history of the UK Fire Service rests fairly and squarely with the Government, our employers and Sir George Bain. If they have calculated that our members do not have the stomach for a determined fight, they have badly miscalculated. We will walk out together at 6pm tomorrow and will not call off action until we have achieved professional pay for professional Firefighters and Emergency Fire Control Staff” (Shaw, 2002).

Following the first 48 hour strike on November 12th 2002, pay talks resumed. Further evidence of *compromise* and *containment* are demonstrated by the FBU, as their leader Andy Gilchrist, delayed a second strike in favour of continued negotiations. By 5am on the morning of 22 November, the FBU executive had voted to accept a deal including a 16% pay rise offered by the employers. Notwithstanding the original 40% claim of May 2002, and the independent reports commissioned by the FBU (Cap Gemini, Ernst and Young, 2002), which indicated a rise of 21% was needed to level the playing field before account was taken of increased activity and skills, the new offer of 16%, “would have been strongly recommended by the FBU leadership to its members” (Seifert and Sibley, 2011, p.336). On the 22nd November, the Secretary of the Fire Brigades’ National Employers, Charles Nolda, wrote to fire authority executives and the Members of the Employer’s side (Fire Brigades’ National Employers, 2002);

For the record;

- 1. The first offer made to the Employers yesterday to the FBU is attached as Appendix 1. It was rejected by the FBU.*
- 2. The draft agreement prepared overnight to the joint secretaries is attached as Appendix. It was endorsed by the FBU, but not by the Employers following a last minute request from Government sources that the Employers should not endorse the draft until Ministers had considered it. This is a new procedure of which we had been given no prior notice.*
- 3. The statement made by the Employers early this morning is attached as Appendix 3.*

That statement read;

Appendix 3

STATEMENT BY THE FIRE SERVICE EMPLOYERS

The Employers believe that the draft agreement prepared overnight is the best way forward.

In view however of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we suggest that the Employers and the Fire Brigades Union seek an urgent meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister.

The deal between the employers and the FBU would have averted the strike. The ODPM intervened again even though pay was a local Government issue and despite Labour's claims towards decentralism and its intervention in the dispute by commissioning the IRFS. Upon reaching agreement with the FBU, the employers were asked to refer any decision to the Deputy Prime Minister's Office (see above). After the long negotiations the Employers called the ODPM at around 05.30 on the 22nd November. They were advised that the Deputy Prime Minister wanted to see all of details of the proposed deal before going any further. The FBU Executive gave the Deputy Prime Minister until 7.30am later that morning to review the deal (Morris and Waugh, 2002). Neither John Prescott, nor his officials were able to read the agreement before the 9am deadline for the start of the strike. Therefore, at 7.28am the FBU announced that the strike was on, and blamed the Government for wrecking the deal. The strike went ahead.

Speaking on Sky News on the 22nd November, Fire Service Minister Nick Raynsford said:

"I am afraid what happened last night was a very sad muddle. Yesterday evening about six o'clock the employers released a document which set out this proposal of achieving pay and modernisation. We have always said that pay and modernisation had to go hand in hand, because any increase of pay above 4% had to be covered by savings and modernisation."

"We had first sight of this revised document, which was substantially different from what the employers had released yesterday evening, at around half past six this morning.

"No responsible Government could possibly write a blank cheque for several hundred millions of pounds without the prospect of modernisation." (Raynsford, 2002).

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme 22nd November, 2002, John Prescott put the blame firmly at the door of the FBU and the employers. Prescott suggested there was no time to analyse the document to ensure it addressed all the modernisation questions raised in the IRFS. He also raised the issue over funding the deal, stating that any increase in salaries of the fire brigade, should be funded through modernisation - not extra cash from central Government funds (Prescott, 2002).

Speaking at the Trade Union Congress (TUC), Organise Conference, November 23rd, 2002, TUC General Secretary John Monks appeared to lay blame back with the Government;

"Brendan Barber and I helped the FBU and the employers construct a draft pay and modernisation agreement. The pay levels were almost precisely those set out by the Deputy Prime Minister in his statement to the House of Commons on Thursday. The modernisation proposals were based around a commitment to reach agreement by the FBU with a right of each party to submit outstanding modernisation issues to independent, binding adjudication.....In my view, this was a robust and practical approach. The employers liked it and we assumed that the Government did too.This was then shattered by the Deputy Prime Minister's decision that he could not sanction the deal without knowing the savings to be made from modernisation. The employers did not therefore make the offer and the strike started" (Monks, 2002).

Thus, politics was to play a huge role in the pay dispute despite its local Government-managed pay structures. Blair's New Britain manifesto had been built on concepts of efficiency and modern public services and the national pay dispute was now testing the new party on the issue of modernisation. Despite 'Third Way' claims of devolution and decentralisation (Giddens, 2013), senior Government ministers had intervened repeatedly in the dispute making the issue high profile and political. Situational logics of *correction* resulting in *compromise* at the structural level and actions that attempted to *contain* the situation had thus far been holding vested interests but it was at the cost of reaching a resolution. The Government's apparent compromise of asking the employers to wait for the outcome of the IRFS to help with understanding pay and roles, effectively promoted the vested interests of the employers and the Labour executive. The most obvious interest being that once the review was completed the Government was committed to intervene again to achieve its dual policy of restricting pay increases to the firefighters to what *it* considered an acceptable level (as opposed to the

Employers), while securing a raft of modernising measures (Blair styled), as the price for future pay increases.

From the morphogenetic perspective, this juncture in the cycle reveals a decline in the hitherto mutuality of the tripartite arrangement and dominant bargaining power of the FBU. Whilst there had been oscillations between the FBU and the Government competing and appearing to compromise with each other (agreeing to talk, calling off strikes, calling for the IRFS), by November 2002 after the talks broke down, what was emerging from the social and socio-cultural interactions were intractable differences. These intractable differences led to *polarization* along the different lines of vested interests of the two power bases (FBU, Government). The effects of holding theories or beliefs which stand in particular logical relationships to other theories or beliefs, places their holders in different ideational positions (Archer, 1995, p.229). The emergent properties of these new situational logics resulted now in cultural *pluralism* at the systemic level (shaded columns in Table 2 below), where the FBU had to choose to either come down on the side of Government and acquiesce to reforms in exchange for a lower pay increase, or to resist/challenge the changes and hold out for better pay deal. This contest would continue to play out bitterly from November 2002 to June 2003 (T²-T³).

	Contradictions		Complementarities	
	Necessary	Contingent	Necessary	Contingent
Situational logic	correction	elimination	protection	opportunism
CEPS of: Cultural system Socio-cultural interaction	<i>syncretism</i>	<i>pluralism</i>	<i>systematisation</i>	<i>specialisation</i>
	unification	cleavage	reproduction	sectionalism
SEPs of: Structural system Social interaction	<i>compromise</i>	<i>competition</i>	<i>integration</i>	<i>differentiation</i>
	containment	polarisation	solidarity	diversification

Table 2. Summary of structural morphogenesis/morphostasis (adapted from Archer, 1995, p.303); CEP: cultural emergent properties; SEP: structural emergent properties.

These developments led to competitive conflicts of ideas which promoted deeper *cleavage* between the Government, the local employers and within the fire service. The resulting situational logic of *elimination* developed as the FBU and the Labour executive *competed* to protect their vested interests. The power struggle appeared to be more than a result of their *polarised* views of modernisation; this was now a test of institutional legitimacy. The IRFS had

not only completed without the participation and input from the key stakeholders (the fire service), it was very quickly promoted by the Government as the definitive model for reform. The report of the IRFS is the second of the four texts to be analysed using critical hermeneutic methods.

Text 2: “Independent Review of the Fire Service, 2002”

4.10 Findings of a critical hermeneutic analysis; the structural reform imperative

By December 2002, after a short review of the fire sector to assist with settling the on-going pay dispute and lasting less than six weeks, Professor George Bain and his co-authors, completed the IRFS. They concluded that the whole service was in need of radical reform and it was now an urgent matter of community safety. The opening paragraph of the Foreword to the IRFS reports said:

“The Fire Service needs to be changed from top to bottom and every aspect of its work reformed to bring it into line with best practice at the start of the twenty-first century.”

(Bain et al. 2002, p.3)

For the critical hermeneutic analysis, thematic references are used as anchors for re-reading the report and entering the hermeneutic circle in efforts to reveal hidden meaning. In reading texts to understand their manifest meaning, the report was read and re-read against prevailing contexts (as outlined from T¹ onwards), using three thematic anchors of ‘independent’ (in terms of the review), ‘efficiency’ and ‘modernisation’. These reveal political undertones that non critical readers may find to be unimportant (Prasad, 2002). The three themes were chosen owing to the emphasis that was placed on the review’s independence (as will be discussed within this analysis), and due to the reoccurring narrative of the Blair Government to modernise public sector to achieve efficiency. The following section demonstrates how these themes were used to support the overall conclusion of the IRFS report.

The decision to commission the independent review as an action taken by the Government is also worthy of critical hermeneutic analysis as well as the text itself. Freedom of Information requests (see Appendix 1), to establish a greater understanding of the origins of commission, including what criteria were applied in selecting the 'expert' and if others were considered and rejected. Therefore, the exact origins of the Government review remain unclear (Rowe and

McAllister 2006), beyond the declaration made in Parliament by John Prescott (outlined earlier).

The questions related to the IRFS origins are fundamental in the search for how the reforms were legitimated. Was the IRFS a benevolent deed of Government to help the fire service employers understand how they could settle the pay claim? Was it a Government device to legitimate an ideological way forward for New Labour's modernisation agenda? Answers to these probes will be discussed in the next section.

For ease of reading only page numbers will be used in this section, since all refer to the single text under hermeneutic analysis here (Independent Review of the Fire Service, 2002), unless otherwise referenced.

4.10.1 Origins; who really asked for it?

In the Foreword to the report, Bain indicates the Government's passive role in the initiation of the review, suggesting they responded to a request from the local Government employers for help;

"The proposal for a review was put forward by the Fire Service employers in the course of discussions at the negotiating body for Fire Service pay, the National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades. The Government decided that such a review would be helpful" (p.1).

Government consultants Mott MacDonald in their 2003 Update Report into Control Rooms, (the fourth text to be analysed in Section 4.19), also referred to the IRFS as an 'initiation' by the Government *"in response to a proposal by fire service employers, to consider the issues facing the service and to assist in discussions regarding fire service pay"* (Mott MacDonald, 2003, p.4). Notable here is the sympathetic language, such as 'proposal', 'consider', 'discussion', firmly attributing the rationale of the Government commission to a benevolent gesture in response to calls from the local authority employers of the fire service. However, other commentators had different perspectives, referring to the IRFS as a review ordered directly by Government in response to the strike threat (Seifert, 2002), suggesting it was strategic and commissioned for political reasons to alter a course of action. In a press release, the FBU labelled the review a meaningless distraction (FBU, 2002).

4.10.2 How independent?

The true origins of the IRFS are questionable, as is its independence. The ability for the review to be independent can be challenged from a number of directions on a number of levels. Yet it

was the very concept of labelling it ‘Independent’ and the frequency with which the IRFS authors and commissioners promoted the independence of the hired ‘experts’ as well as their inquiry methods, which fundamentally served to objectively position its conclusions from the views of the Government. This would help to portray the ODPM as uninvolved and nonpartisan in shaping the subsequent reforms that were recommended by the review. There are 34 references to the independence of the review in the first and final chapters of the final report (both chapters totalling 15 pages), such as;

“We have carried out our work independently and objectively” (p.i)

“The review is independent of all parties and will consider all of the issues facing the Fire Service including modernisation and pay” (p.130)

“The Review is completely independent of Government. Its purpose is to review objectively the situation within the Fire Service and to make recommendations accordingly. Evidence will not be published by the Review and hearings will be held in private” (p.131).

With regards to the independence of the review, despite the regular use of the word throughout the report, there are challenges to its ability to be independent in light of the predominant industrial relations, the threat of strikes and the fundamental significance of the absence of key stakeholder representation, namely the FBU. The FBU had refused to participate in the IRFS on the grounds of the review’s validity as discussed in an interview on BBC Radio 4’s *On the Record* programme, 20th October, 2002 between John Humphreys, Nick Raynsford and Andy Gilchrist:

HUMPHREYS: Mr Gilchrist, why not wait for the review to report?

ANDY GILCHRIST: Well, the review is not actually a review into pay at all. It’s a very wide ranging review and we question seriously the independence of it.

HUMPHREYS: Sir George Bain is an eminently independent man. Everybody believes that.

GILCHRIST: Our issue is not about the eminence of Sir George Bain. The fact is, this is not an independent inquiry. The Prime Minister, indeed the Deputy Prime Minister, have backed up the fact that even if Sir George Bain were to find that we were right in claiming forty per cent, that in fact he would not be allowed to award that.

HUMPHREYS: Nonetheless, you'd have a stronger moral case for taking action wouldn't you, if you had an independent review saying yes, they ought to get forty per cent, that would be a pretty powerful argument for you, wouldn't it?

GILCHRIST: Well there is no such thing at the moment as an independent review of pay. What there is, is a rather farcical wide-ranging review into the Fire Service.

Raising the issue in the House of Commons on 22nd October, 2002, John Prescott said:

"The Bain review will be the way this argument over firefighters' pay will be settled. The TUC is serving on the review, along with an employer's representative. Unfortunately the FBU won't even cooperate with the inquiry, the FBU won't even work with the review to get the firefighters higher pay through the review of the existing criteria which presently governs their pay.

I think that is wrong, I think it is short-sighted and I believe the general public cannot understand it." (HC Deb, 22 October 2002, c125)

The length of time in which the review was to be completed (six weeks with interim reporting within four weeks), was exceedingly short compared to other public sector structural or pay reviews of a similar national scope. For example, Thomas Winsor was appointed on 1st October 2010 to conduct an independent review of police officer and staff remuneration and conditions. Volume 1 of the report was published 18 months later in March 2012 (Winsor, 2012). An independent review of the UK postal services sector was commissioned 19 December 2007 and that report was published 12 months later on 12th December, 2008 (Hopper, 2008). The matter of only weeks for completing the IRFS, makes the position of the review's authors less than clear in terms of their genuine independence in reviewing the fire service conditions of service. Was it to help settle the pay dispute, or quite plausibly, was their role to assist the Government in buying time, as competing situational logics began to threaten their vested interests. Whichever it was, the interruption to the industrial dispute process that the IRFS represented and its timing, undoubtedly compromised the fire service employers from taking any further action to resolve the pay dispute until its publication.

Adding to the contentions around the independence of the review, selection of its members was also unclear. In the course of this research, two Freedom of Information requests (Appendix 1),

were refused in requesting information on how members of the review were chosen. The review itself states,

“Membership of the Review was put together with the co-operation of the Government, the employers’ organisations and fire authorities in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as the General Secretary of the TUC” (p.i).

If three months seemed short for an independent review of a national public sector service and its 47 institutions, the actual duration of the research process was even shorter. Bain had stated *“This report is the result of a three-month review which we have carried out into the UK Fire Service” (p.i)*. The review was launched on 20th September 2002 and whilst a final report publication date was indicated as Christmas 2002, a detailed position report, containing the majority of the recommendations was submitted to John Prescott on 11th November, 2002. According to the cover letter to DMPM by Bain, with which the position paper was submitted he said,

“In light of the discussions currently underway between the Fire Brigade employers and unions, we thought it would be helpful for us to indicate to you, and through you to them, the general thrust of some of our findings (Bain, 2002a).

The position paper outlined the review authors’ views on what needed to be done to deliver a modern fire service, indicating that the review was itself completed and views were finalised for dissemination within six weeks.

4.10.3 How valid?

The team’s ability to conduct a sector-wide review in such a short timescale is attributed by Bain to its reliance on secondary data from previous reports undertaken by other agencies. Bain advised that collecting fresh evidence was constrained by the short deadline set by the ODPM and industrial action, limiting access to fire service staff;

“We had as our starting point the long list of reports and reviews of all or parts of the Fire Service which have been produced over the last twenty-five years. These identified many of the issues and questions that this Review would need to tackle. They even identified many of the answers. Although this review was conducted very quickly, we were able to reach some firm conclusions because of the strong body of earlier work supported by the evidence we received, most of it displaying a uniform view of the urgent need for change” (p.1).

The convincing portrayal of 25 years' worth of previous data as authoritative and definitive, able to stand the test of time, conceals both the on-going changes in the sector that *had* been taking place for several years prior to the IRFS and the questionable validity of 25 year old data. Bain downplayed the lack of FBU member/firefighter involvement;

"The union's stance also inhibited some face-to-face contact with firefighters during our visits. But it did not deter more than ninety firefighters" (p.1).

However, 90 participants (their ranks not indicated), represented only 0.15% of the possible 59000 national operational staff at the time in England alone, who could have taken part.

Bain's reliance on previous Government-commissioned reports did not stretch to the more contemporary report commissioned by the FBU to establish proposals for modernisation (A Modern Fire Service: The True Challenge, Cap Gemini, Ernst & Young, 2002). Bain's failure to reference that report in any way throughout his review process was surprising. The report was discussed in Parliament to support not only the pay claim (The 2002 Labour Research Report into the Operation of the Pay Formula and the 2002 Hastings Research Report into the Role of the Modern Firefighter), but also to support a "productivity deal" which would pay for it.

4.10.4 Whose language?

Though written by a senior academic, the IRFS report employs the language of Government, endorsing the business language of New Labour on many occasions. For example, the opening chapter of the final report says:

*"We believe that the service we describe will be able to meet current and future challenges **flexibly**; to offer challenging and well-rewarded work to a wide range of staff; and to respond to the need for **continuous improvements in performance** whether through working with others or **spreading good practice**. But the merits of **our vision** will count for nothing if what we propose is not put into practice."* (p.2, emphasis added)

This language is remarkably similar in context with the dominant politics of the Blair Government and its modernisation agenda. However, in generalising the concept of reform and modernisation to the wider public sector, the report fails to focus on the fundamental issues of the fire service, about which specifically, the review was commissioned (pay). For example, the regular use of the term 'modern'; the report makes no effort to agree a starting point for its

definition in the context of the IRFS, or to indicate consultation of the idea that there is only one way to modernise. At the time, Blair's view of modernisation leaned towards privatisation or at least to manage public services like private service with customers, rather than what the fire service was/is; a public service with users and potential users.

Similarly, for concepts such as best practice and methods of funding, the report does not indicate agreed consensus of these 'givens' upon which the report was founded. Bain's use of Blair's Government language and the undeclared assumptions and definitions upon which his review was based, arguably undermines its independence, regardless of the regular references he makes.

Whilst the use of Government language sets an authoritative tone, Bain also employs emotive rhetoric, which establishes the benevolent tone needed to connect persuasively to readers and the wider public. The emotive rhetoric begins in the opening lines of the report leaving readers with a sense of dismay about the state of the fire service:

*"Localised responses to emergencies are working well, but it is a **sad** fact that too many people in this country **die in fires** and the number of fires is currently increasing each year. **This cannot be right. Urgent action** is required to **make things better**".* (p.iii, emphasis added).

Not only does this contradict the terms of reference for the review (to understand structures and roles to help settle the pay dispute), it also conceals the considerable work that was on-going in relation to discussions about modernisation before the pay dispute.

Opening the document with references to failure and loss of life and the unacceptability of doing nothing, whilst omitting evidence that would counter such claims appears divisive. Government statistics for that year actually indicated decreasing fire deaths as well as evidence of ongoing modernisation since previous Government interventions. This paragraph from the ODPM's (2002) Fire Statistics report attests to this;

"In 2002, there were 562 deaths from fires in the United Kingdom compared with 606 in 2001 and 613 in 2000. The latest figure is the lowest number recorded since 1961. By the 1970s, the number of people dying in fires had reached about 1,000 per year. Since 1979 there has been a general long-term fall in the total number of fire related deaths". (para 1.13).

Furthermore, if the fire service had remained unchanged for decades the comments made in Parliament five years earlier by (the then opposition), Jack Straw MP in a discussion on cuts to the service and the loss of a firefighter on duty in Wales, would also conflict with Bain's views;

"I beg to move, that this House congratulates the Fire Service on its exemplary record as one of the most consistently high-performing services in local Government; is appalled by the uncertainty over the future of the world-renowned Fire Service College; and deeply regrets the lack of any clear strategy by Her Majesty's Government properly to sustain and to develop the service. As our motion spells out, the fire service in Great Britain is one of the most consistently high-performing services in local Government". That is a direct quotation from the Audit Commission in its comment on the 1994–95 performance indicators for local Government, which were published last month" (HC Deb, 08 May 1996 Vol 277 cc296-342).

What Bain's approach achieves in using commanding language to highlight the inadequacy of the fire service, is to position the review as independent, benevolent and authoritative. It implies the IRFS process can rescue the fire service, which is much loved and respected by all, but has fallen into the wrong hands. It implies that the review itself can move it on and can finally *"make things better"* (p.iii).

We are reminded of the rescue 'mission' in the closing paragraphs of the Foreword, after which the authors give their signatures, giving the impression of their personal pledge;

"The important message is for everyone to recognise both the need for change and the gains from doing so. Staying where we are is not an option, and we believe that reform will bring greater gains for everyone. We hope that when you have read our report, you will agree. We leave you with the words of one of the members of the Fire Service who met us during one of our visits. Her message, quite simply, was 'don't let us down this time'." (p. i)

In summing up the introductory section to the report, Bain repeats a key phrase and infers that before the review, no changes at all had happened across the service for decades and without it, none were going to.

"Staying where we are is not an option, and we believe that reform will bring greater gains for everyone. We hope that when you have read our report, you will agree" (p. ii).

Bain's rhetoric of lament conceals the fact that reforming the fire service had been on the agenda long before the IRFS. Changes were happening and the need for structural reform had been agreed. Reform had been the subject of continuous debate in relation to pay and conditions that preceded the review, reform was also the subject of modernisation proposals by other independent consultants hired by CFOA and the FBU and a fire service consultation exercise before the 2001 General Election, for which a draft was produced, but never published. It had been drafted following full consultation with Fire Service stakeholders including the Employer Organisations, Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association and the FBU. On 19th November 2002, Andy Gilchrist sent to John Prescott a position statement along with the contents of the draft White Paper. It detailed the framework of the modernising Government programme. It also contained what the stakeholders who took part had believed to be the true modernisation of the Fire Service and a reform agenda that would take the Service forward. Gilchrist said:

"The Fire Brigades Union has launched its own views on the modernisation of the fire service to drag it into the 21st century. Its proposals are in line with the Government's last stated aims contained in a draft proposed but never published in 2001. As I have stated many times, the FBU would have no difficulty discussing a significant increase in pay in conjunction with an open and progressive discussion on modernisation, the framework of which it believes is contained in the attached document. It is our sincere wish to avoid future strike action, and the FBU believes that a genuine commitment to a deal with pay linked to modernisation as set out in the attached document could be the basis for achieving this." (Gilchrist, 2002)

The introductory paragraph of the draft read;

"The Fire Service is one of the most consistently high-performing services in local Government. This 'succeeding' service is highly effective in its work of responding to fire and other emergencies and widely admired by the public. Certainly the Audit Commission Performance Indicators for 1999-2000 published in January 2001 fully bear it out. At the same time, the role of the fire service has begun to change, essentially from a reactive to a proactive one; and the next few years will see a major transformation in the way fire brigades deliver services to the public." (Un-published, n.d).

And;

"The fire service has already made considerable progress towards modernisation" (ibid).

Comparing Bain's (2002), opening themes to the IRFS (fire deaths, the need for urgent action, and doing nothing not being an option) with those of the draft, the contrast is stark, yet it would be the IRFS that would shape the reforms that entered legislation a year later. The evidence of the draft indicates that the need to modernise the fire service was not disputed. The IRFS conceals this truth with rhetoric of the fire service doing nothing and of failure. In fact, what was actually in question between the stakeholders was the definition of modernisation. The FBU's veto on participating in the IRFS enabled Bain to discard any other of their contributions outside of the review process, including the unpublished draft White Paper and the FBU's modernisation proposals (Cap Gemini, Ernst and Young, 2002).

Exclusion of *any* contributions from the FBU and the sole use of reports by Government consultants, hired decades earlier (for example, Mott MacDonald), throws into question the true level of independence of the review process.

4.10.5 A new sense of urgency

The report introduces and sets the tone with the concept of urgency very early on page one of the Executive Summary; *"Urgent action is required to make things better"*. Although the 'urgent' dimension relates largely to risk management, fire cover, and diversity, it would be this the new sense of urgency that appears in the narrative of the Government's follow-up White Paper (Our Fire and Rescue Service, 2003), that amongst other structural changes, legislates for control room restructuring through regionalisation via the FiReControl project. Ironically, the IRFS explicitly cautioned against regionalisation of control rooms; (*"we do not, however, favour a major re-organisation"*, p.iv). The introduction of the 'urgent reform' narrative in the IRFS allowed the subsequent 2003 White Paper to imply the concept of urgency for the regionalisation of control rooms, despite the questionable evidence trail.

This unjustified, and hitherto unmentioned sense of urgency also shows itself to have travelled across time and departments when textual excerpts are analysed in future Government level meetings in relation to the rush to get the FiReControl project to get off the ground in 2005. The latter sense of urgency links the reforms to imminent terror attacks (which would emerge in future Government reform documents as the national security imperative, discussed in Section 4.11). However, Bain's introduction of the sense of urgency was associated with addressing inadequate risk management and unacceptable numbers of domestic house fire

deaths (notwithstanding the downward trajectory of these statistics that his report had concealed).

Discussing numbers of death from fire, Bain had stated;

“This cannot be right. Urgent action is required to make things better” (p.iii), and *“The leadership must recognise that urgent action is required”* (p.v).

The tone of much of the language in the review indicates an authority of the authors, which was not qualified in the report. In light of the minimal new evidence, limited access to stakeholder views, the political environment and compromised conditions of delivery and completion of the review, the assumed authority of Bain and his colleagues in making the claims, indicates a skill or experience level which are well beyond the competence of the authors. All these limitations aside, the report nevertheless advised the following and this would pave the way for reform, New Labour-style;

“There needs to be a new policy-making body, led by Ministers in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. This needs to set a framework, making clear what the Government requires from the Fire Service; the ways in which the Service should be modernised”, (p.iii).

4.10.6 Bain on regionalism

Recalling the debates around Labour values, New Labour and the concept of devolved power from the Centre (c.f Section 4.9.2), the 2001 Labour Manifesto stated;

“Some functions are best tackled at the regional level. Economic development is the core of regional policy today” (Blair, 2001).

This is an important statement in its similarity to comments made in the IRFS, again without the evidence one might have expected from an academic undertaking a national public service review. It is another example of Bain’s use of political language, mimicking the Government’s perspectives as opposed to objective and evidenced findings.

“There are cogent arguments in favour of moving the Fire Service onto a regional structure. New responsibilities are emerging, such as the need to deal with major terrorist incidents. These are best handled above brigade level” (p.iv)

Despite Bain's considerably authoritative, emotive language and his sense of urgency in calling for immediate, radical and Government-controlled reforms in almost every other aspect of the English fire service, a pivotal issue is that the IRFS report dedicates less than a page to the idea of rationalisation of control rooms. Whilst acknowledging the debates that had taken place on this political agenda (see last quote), despite the modernisation imperative expressed throughout the report, in respect of regional control rooms, Bain is succinct, concluding;

We do not, however, favour a major re-organisation ...; the Fire Service will already have a major programme of change to handle" (p. iv).

4.10.7 Empowering Government

The terms of reference of the IRFS did not cover changes to governance. Participation in the review by ministers and fire service agencies such as the inspectorate, are not mentioned in the list of individuals or parties consulted. However, Bain assumes a taken-for-granted authority in recommending considerable changes to governance that are required if the reforms are to be implemented and these changes indicate significant increases in ministerial power over the fire service. Likewise there are bold statements for which no references are given to support;

"At the same time, most of the principal parties in the current arrangements – Government, local authorities, inspectorates, professional bodies, unions, and CFBAC – believe that the responsibility for this lack of progress lies elsewhere" (p.46)

This is not evidenced and the following statement is vague yet accusatory; *"The existing machinery is clearly not working" (p.46).* Again, and without underpinning analysis or evidence to support; *"The most appropriate means to translate policy into action is the framework for local Government set by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)" (p.46).*

Importantly, this language further evidences how the 'independent' review mirrored Government opinion. It seemed to be part of the negotiating process rather than independent from it; a view that was shared by Dr Dennett, an independent fire consultant. Giving evidence to the ODPM Committee's inquiry (4 November 2003, QQ 118-120) he went further in his criticism of the Bain review:

"I think it [the Bain Review] is significantly flawed because it did not collect the evidence available to it...I think it is a political report; I think it errs on the side of Government and looks at the solution to the problem, if you like, rather than the problem. There is so

much in it, for example, that is unsubstantiated about recruitment, about bullying and about the general standards of fire cover, and there is nothing in the report that I have seen that is supportive of those conclusions”

4.11 The unfolding story

Despite the many limitations with the nature of the IRFS that a hermeneutic reading has illuminated, what it subsequently set in motion was a programme of radical changes. What is important to this case is the impact of the IRFS and the power of its recommendations, especially the new authority to be transferred the ODPM to widen its legislative control over the fire service. Of fundamental relevance to the FiReControl project are the recommendations it made in relation to regionalisation i.e. - not to do it. The 2003 House of Commons ODPM Select Committee 4th Report reiterated Bain’s recommendation regarding control room rationalisation, advocating greater *collaboration* between fire brigades on cross-cutting issues such as civil resilience but *not major reorganisation*. Despite both, the review itself and the Select Committee agreement recommending *not* to reform control rooms, and notwithstanding the Government’s frequent reference to the unquestionable authority of the Bain report in justifying its far-reaching reforms, the clear recommendations not to reorganise control rooms would from here on be concealed. Without further inquiry, reforming the fire control room function through regionalisation entered Government narrative and would from here be discussed as if Bain had recommended it. Thus, in Prescott’s follow up White Paper, 30 June 2003, ‘Our Fire and Rescue Service’ his personal vision for regionalisation would become a prominent element of fire service reform as well as a step towards the flagging policy for regional governance.

The hermeneutic analysis of the IRFS report looked beneath the surface of this second important document. The review was apparently commissioned to help employers understand how to settle the pay dispute, but it became a powerful tool to legitimate the Government’s vision for reform over any evidence-based alternatives.

Returning to the timeframe of the morphogenetic sequence (T^2 to T^3), in which the IRFS took place, Government rhetoric was painting a picture of the dispute as a struggle for and against progress and modernisation along the lines of the Government wanting it and the FBU wanting to remain unchanged. In a Prime Ministerial press conference about the fire dispute (25th November 2002), responding to questions from journalists, Blair was asked if he had ever used the word *Scargillism* (*a term used to describe militant strike action after Arthur Scargill, the*

President of the National Union of Mineworkers 1992 to 2002) . The Telegraph published Tony Blair's responses in an article the next day, 26th November, 2002 (Jones, 2002);

"What I have said is that industrial militancy to pursue political ends, which I guess is what people would think of as Scargillism, is not on.

I hope and believe the firefighters are not trying to do that. We have got to be very clear about that. Those days are over."

This is a strike they can't win, it would not be a defeat for the Government; it would be a defeat for the country."

The media coverage of the pay dispute played a soignificant role in the pay dispute. Under New Labour, Tony Blair had doubled the number of special advisers to 81 at a cost of £4.4m to the public purse, compared with £1.8m in 1997 (BBC News online 2002). The role of a special adviser was to advise ministers on media communications, 26 worked directly for the prime minister. In 2002, newspaper leaders, writers and columnists would be briefed by Philip Bassett who ran No 10's strategic communications unit. Interviews with union members revealed they believed the national press was generally hostile towards their case, and the tabloid 'Sun' newspaper was considered as one of the worst offenders (O'Neill, 2007).

"Examples of headlines from the Sun in this period, which coincided with the run-up to the Iraq War, include, "Fire strike a 'gift for terrorists'" (13 November 2002) and "Fire union chiefs are Saddam Stooges" (14 November 2002). Other Sun headlines read "Wrecker in chief" (14 November 2002); "Beat the Bully" (21 November 2002); "Crews 'stuck in the past'" (26 November 2002). The Times referred to the "Winter of Discontent"(12 and 13 November 2002,) the name given to a period in the 1970s when many unions in the UK were on strike, and the "hard left" (13 November 2002), while the Express referred to union "dinosaurs" and "our lives put on the line" (13 November 2002), as well as headlines such as "Killed by the fire strike" (15 November 2002)" (O'Neill, 2007, p. 15).

Labour's media-managed rhetoric had unintended consequences. Rather than cast the FBU in a 'Luddite' light as they had hoped for, it actually united the wider trade union movement behind the FBU. When Labour publically denigrated the union's rejection of the IRFS and its apparent aims to arrive at a pay settlement, many other unions publicly voiced their support for

the FBU. An article in the Guardian published the following statements indicating union support for the FBU pay claim;

Derek Simpson, Amicus: "The only people who have introduced politics are those elements of new Labour who revile trade unions"

Bill Morris, TGWU: Believes a new Labour "sabotage squad" deliberately scuppered a negotiated deal

Mick Rix, Aslef: Accuses Downing Street of seeking a confrontation to deter others

Dave Prentis, Unison: "If the Government wants a long dispute it can have one"

Mark Serwotka, PCS: Says ministers using public funds to take on trade unions

Even Beverley Malone, general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing, itself a non-striking union showed public support urging the FBU and employers to resume negotiations said; "We respect the right of our colleagues to push their issues forward in the way that they feel they need to," she said. "I would call it warm support." (Maguire, 2002)

4.12 The effects of 'Two Jags Prezsa': the failure of agency

The threat of Blair's entire public sector modernisation project would be compromised by the FBU securing a significant pay increase on a 'no-strings' basis. To counter this risk, the general management of the dispute was centralised to the ODPM, headed by John Prescott. Prescott's role was to prevent the dispute from moving beyond the control of the Government (Dinan et al, 2006), or maybe, to prevent the local authority employers from agreeing to deals that did not suit the Government?

John Prescott had courted controversy during his tenure at the ODPM. Originally, the media referred to Prescott almost affectionately as "Prezza" but as various misfortunes befell him the nicknames became more detrimental to his Labour roots and particularly to his credibility. The names would impact on his integrity and his political agency during the period T² to T³. Names such as "Two Jags"²¹ (Prescott owned a jaguar, and had the use of another as his official

²¹ "'Two Jags' Prescott in parking row". *BBC News* (BBC). 27 July 2001. Retrieved 23 February 2014

ministerial car); then "Two Jabs"²² (following his retaliation against a protest farmer in 2001); and "Two Shacks"²³ (referring to his former country house). The nicknames would serve to undermine Prescott's credibility as a grass roots union man, the profile upon which his political character had been built prior to Labour's election in 1997. The morphogenetic perspective of the changes to Prescott's credibility during the fire dispute will be an important issues discussed in Chapter 5.

The highly political move by Blair to appoint Prescott to manage the fire dispute as it escalated in November 2002 back-fired at the beginning. Prescott's new media image portrayed him not as a union man, but a man of luxury cars enjoying the accommodations of high office. Prescott was now considered by many to be a contradiction to his union roots (Pyper, 2003). He failed to stop the second strike in 2002 and was fast losing credibility. Avoiding further personal confrontation at this stage, he became less visible. The Guardian reported the Government explaining Prescott's diminished presence was down to him spending time with the local authorities to "work through some of the issues in respect of costings" (Guardian, 2002).

4.13 Toning down the rhetoric: building New Labour's agency

The temporary absence of Prescott can be seen as a strategic media move by the Labour party to appear to back off, whilst controlling the reputational damage to Prescott and the party as the FBU showed strength in numbers. In an attempt to keep relations working, the Government appear at this stage to be in a state of compromise as they deployed what seemed like containment strategies. For example, in a clearly political attempt to indicate the party's allegiance with the union movement, senior, old school-Labour, pro-union MPs Ian McCartney (Minister of State at the Department for Work and Pensions) and Adam Ingram (Minister of State at the Ministry of Defence) were engaged in the fire dispute. Some were sceptical of the move to bring in obvious unionist MPs. In respect of Ian McCartney, a former minister told the Guardian (Maguire and White, 2002): *"Every now and then it suits the Government to have someone with a regional accent putting their case"*. The article suggested Ian McCartney had said his role was a modest one; *"I'm not involved in the fire dispute, I'm not there to negotiate, John Prescott is responsible. But I am very much involved in developing relations with the trades unions."* (Maguire and White, 2002)

²² "Prescott punches protester". *On This Day* (BBC). 16 May 2001. Retrieved 11 March 2015

²³ "Two Shacks' Prescott". *The Guardian*. 1 Weaver, Matthew, June 2006. Retrieved 11 March 2015.

Whether they helped the negotiations is not clear but their media-managed presence gave the perception Government was trying its best to contain the problem and resolve the dispute. An article in The Telegraph, 30th November, said;

The increasingly sour relationship between the Government and the FBU was also signalled last night when Adam Ingram, the Armed Forces minister, demanded that an FBU official apologise for claiming that the Army was not coping with fighting fires during the strike.

His demand came after Dave Patten, an FBU national officer, said he wanted to "destroy this myth" that the 19,000 servicemen and women were coping with a service carried out by 55,000 fire-fighters.

"The Army is not coping well at all," Mr Patten told BBC News 24. "The Army are not providing a fire service, they are merely providing first aid cover."

In a strongly-worded statement Mr Ingram said last night: "All servicemen and women engaged in firefighting duties did not join up to do this work, but as ever they have performed magnificently and I will not have them attacked and undermined by people like Mr Patten, who is not fit to lace their boots."

However, evidence of New Labour's growing power was emerging when, after pay talks broke down further at the end of 2002, despite the numerous Labour MPs who were variously drafted into the talks, (e.g. John Prescott, Nick Raynsford, John Reid, Peter Hain, Gordon Brown, Chris Leslie, Margaret Beckett, Tony Blair, Ian McCartney (Maguire and White, 2002), John Prescott was returned to centre stage to lead again the Government's management of the dispute. Seemingly, politically stronger, Prescott had called the local fire authority employers to talks, authoritatively directing them to adhere to the recommendations from the IRFS, which he later repeated in the House of Commons (HC Deb 26 November 2002 vol 395 cc165-85).

"Secondly, any pay rise in addition to the 4 per cent already on the table must be paid for by modernisation. That is the clear message that I have given in every meeting I have held with the employers and the FBU since the early summer. It is the same message that has been repeated by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and members of the Government ever since this dispute started" And;

“The way forward is for the employers and the union to sit down and discuss how quickly the service can be modernised, how much can be saved, and when the firefighters will get their extra pay. What is absolutely clear, however, is that this fire service strike will have no influence on that process. The Government are not willing to abandon the clear principles that I have set out in the face of industrial action.”

In terms of New Labour’s growing strength in the dispute, the obvious toning down of the rhetoric and shuffling to the fore of union-friendly ministers to front discontented unions, coupled with timely reappearances of the more senior hard-line ministers, “epitomised its adroit approach in this context” (Pyper 2003, p.504).

Prescott returned wielding the might of Parliament, threatening new legislative powers to impose a pay and reform package if the dispute was not resolved by Easter 2003. Speaking in Parliament January 28 2003, Prescott said;

“As a matter of priority, I will introduce legislation in the public interest to take new powers of direction over the Fire Service. These powers will, it is to be hoped, bring a new and much-needed sense of reality into future negotiations.

I will discuss through the usual channels, including the devolved Administrations, the best way forward to introduce this legislation. I will draw on provisions in the Fire Service Act 1947, which were repealed in 1959. Those provisions allowed the Secretary of State to specify the pay, terms and conditions of the Fire Service. In addition, we will propose powers to direct the Fire Service on its objectives and its use of facilities and assets.

Legislation in itself will not end the dispute, but it is prudent to take these powers to use if necessary to help reach an agreement.” (HC Deb 28 January 2003 vol 643 cc1013-26)

The Government’s threat of legislation to take control of the dispute, despite an earlier pay agreement between the FBU and the employers, evidences the Government’s use of its ultimate power in legislation. The party had used every measure available to it to protect its vested interests and had developed powerful agency along the way. The same cannot be said of the FBU, once dominant and effective in achieving their corporatist agenda. Powerful at the start of the pay claim and overwhelmingly successful in harnessing the support of 87% of members

to strike, FBU authority appears to wane as the analysis moves through the period T² to T³. Their demise was not because of a weaker or less appropriate pay/modernisation agenda but may have been due to playing less tactically and having less capability in harnessing the powerful effects of rhetoric and strategic use of media.

Since the eve of the 22 November 2002, when the FBU dropped its claim for a 40% rise in favour of 16% and later accepting that it would be paid over two years and in return for some reform of the fire service, the agency of the FBU begins to diminish. Though contentious and challenging to the Government, the FBU leader Andy Gilchrist maintains his loyalty to the party, despite New Labour's approach to the fire service. Even at the most bitter height of the dispute, Gilchrist writing in *The Guardian*, was still advocating his union's continued allegiance to Labour;

"My call on Saturday was simply to work within the constitution of Labour to reclaim the party for socialist values and pro-working class policies: to work for greater equality and fairer rewards, for full employment and jobs paying decent wages, for progressive taxation to fund better public services" (Gilchrist, 2002)

Tony Blair in stark contrast had publically rejected the union movement even before he was successful in the 1997 General Election. Asked if he, like PM Thatcher had said she would, bury socialism, he said:

"No I wouldn't agree with that at all. What I think is sensible however is that the Labour Party wants to take the country forward and it is New Labour and we don't want battles over public versus private sector, bosses versus workers, those are things of the past." (Blair, 1997, quoted in Bull, 2000, p.187).

After five years in Government, Blair was still not a union-sympathiser. He continued to publically repudiate the FBU and in November 2002, accused their pay claims of potentially wrecking the economy and referring to Union leaders as 'Scargillites' (after the militant leader of the National Union of Miners, Arthur Scargill, who had ordered miners out on strike without a ballot in 1986) (Monks, 2002).

4.14 The ODPM and the success of agency, 2003

Moving on through the timeframe between T² and T³, by spring 2003, the pay dispute was still unresolved. Figure 12 presents a summary of the key events of January to April 2003 in relation to the pay dispute²⁴ following the publication of the all-important IRFS.

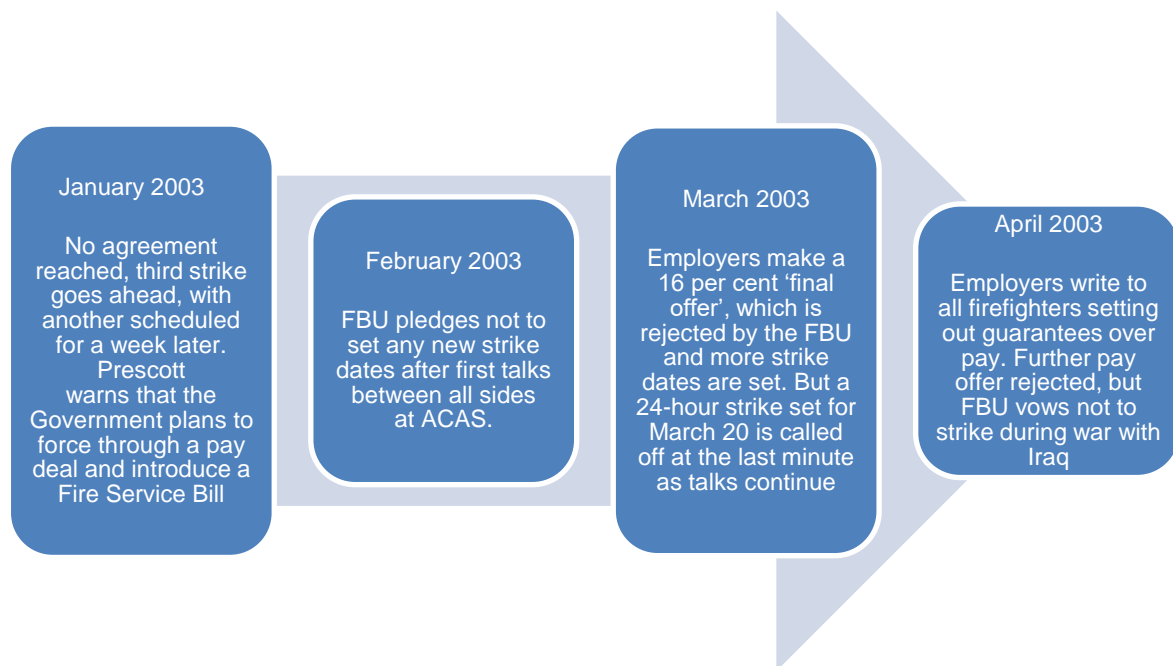


Figure 12. Summary of key events of pay dispute January to April 2003.

4.15 Tenuous links to reform

Since its December 2002 publication, the recommendations of the IRFS were used by the Government to represent the definitive framework for modernisation if any pay rise was to be approved. The FBU continued to reject the offers having first lodged the claim for 40% increase back in May 2002 and being on the brink of accepting 16% with originally the agreed modernisation measures (developed with all stakeholders), back in November before the IRFS was commissioned. Figure 12 shows that in April 2003, a 16% offer was rejected by the FBU as the increases were to be spread over two years and included all of the IRFS recommendations for modernisation. By May, John Prescott was advising Parliament to legislate for change and for increased powers to impose pay levels in the fire service. On May 8th 2003, Prescott addressed the House of Commons;

²⁴ Timeline: "Firefighters' pay dispute" <http://www.theguardian.com/firefighters/subsection/0,12536,839787,00.html>. Retrieved 07/07/14

“I beg to move, that the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is with some reluctance that I find myself here today. This is a Bill that I would have preferred not to introduce, but after 12 months of negotiations and three separate pay offers, the fire dispute has reached deadlock. Legislation is therefore necessary in the public interest and to protect public safety. Reform of the public services is one of this Government's key priorities. In recent months, we have pressed ahead with the modernisation of the fire service, the repeal of section 19 of the Fire Service Act 1947, the introduction of a new system of fire cover based on actual risk, and a new White Paper that will be published shortly.

The Bill now before the House draws on the arbitration powers originally set out in the Fire Service Act 1947 but repealed in 1959. It will enable me—in England, but not Scotland—to make an order to do two things: first, under clause 1(1)(a), and subject to the negative resolution procedure, to set or modify the pay and conditions of service of fire brigade members; and secondly, under clause 1(1)(b), to give specific or general directions to the fire authorities about the use or disposal of property or facilities. Those combined powers will enable me to secure a pay and modernisation deal for the fire service if no agreement is reached through the normal process of industrial negotiations, and only after full consultation with the parties. That is the situation that we find ourselves in today.” (HC Deb, 8 May 2003, c856)

In June 2003, based on what the Government considered the only way to modernise (i.e, findings from the IRFS), the ODPM published its White Paper, ‘Our Fire and Rescue Service’, which presented its intentions to reform the fire service. Discussing its publication with the House of Commons, Prescott was keen to stress the contents of the paper were totally in line with recommendations from Bain’s IRFS (Prescott, HC Debates 30 June 2003 cc 21-24)

This is important to remember since it would be here that an important departure is made between the evidence (labelled as such by the Government) and the policy that ensued.

White Papers are documents produced by the Government setting out details of future policy on a particular subject and usually the basis for a Bill to be put before Parliament. Bain and his co-authors had spent only six weeks gathering evidence before recommending urgent, radical, structural reform remarkably similar to Blair’s New Britain vision for public service modernisation. On the strength of Bain’s ‘independent and expert evidence’, John Prescott’

subsequent White Paper set out the policies that would achieve Bain's urgent, radical, structural reforms, with one notable exception; the addition of the concept of regionalisation.

Prescott was able to use the White Paper process as a vehicle to re-energise his preference for regional governance on the back of the IRFS. He was able to do this with no further evaluation for his policy. The following section provides a critical hermeneutic analysis of the third of the key reform texts, again with the intention of revealing hidden meaning that helped to further the objectives of the Government.

Text 3: "Our Fire and Rescue Service, 2003"

4.16 Findings of a critical hermeneutic analysis; the national security imperative

For ease of reading only page numbers will be used in this section, since all refer to the single text under hermeneutic analysis here (Our Fire and Rescue Service White Paper, 2003), unless otherwise referenced.

4.16.1 Setting a different tone

Earlier that year, Professor Bain had said in his Foreword to the IRFS,

"While it may be an unachievable aspiration that no one should die from fire in the future, we believe there is plenty of scope to drive down fatalities, injuries, loss of property and damage to the environment to negligible levels" (Bain et. al 2002, p.ii).

Importantly, Bain chooses to highlight fire deaths and injuries in his mood-setting Foreword and makes no mention of terrorism. Six months later and apparently in direct response to the IRFS, the White Paper, which would indicate the Government's policy and proposals for legislation to reform the fire service, opened with themes of terrorism. The document went on to mention terrorism 27 times. In the first paragraph, it is stated that the fire service is;

"..now developing a wider role. That role involves tackling new threats which we are now facing, including terrorism, and threats such as flooding and other environmental disasters" (p. xx).

This is one of many examples whereby the Government chooses language to omit, conceal or reveal facts to suit the report. For example, the idea of 'new threats' suggests the fire service had not faced any before. However, the document makes no mention of the prior decades of

IRA mainland terrorism for example, or the major flooding incidents the fire service had always managed, along with other agencies.

In seeking to interpret more via the hermeneutic circle of re-reading the parts, relating them to the contextual 'whole' (Gadamer, 1975), it becomes possible to establish the relevance of language and the use of content, which the authors chose to reveal and that which was concealed to achieve certain ends (New Labour-style modernisation). Against the backdrop of the ODPM's regional Government agenda, through hermeneutic analysis, a considerable shift in emphasis from Bain's structural reforms to the ODPMs political agenda for regional Government emerges. This is coupled with the equally shifting imperatives for reform, from economic (April, 2000 when Mott MacDonald first reviewed best value options for control rooms), to the structural reform imperative (December 2002, Bain's IRFS), to a national security imperative, (June 2003, ODPM's White Paper). By the time the 2003 White Paper is published fire service reform must be achieved by regional coordination. How did the Government deliver this perspective?

The White Paper opens with a benevolent tone, set by John Prescott in the familiar and warm, personally signed and photographed Foreword. This would contrast sharply with the accusatory and authoritative tone in later sections of the document, related to the areas of contention at that time; namely, regionalisation, modernisation and unions. Prescott's benevolent manner suggests respect for a much-loved service;

"We pay tribute to the bravery of individual fire-fighters in the face of multiple hazards" (p.15).

"This does not mean that we want to dictate from the centre matters, which should be left to local discretion" (p.30).

"We would not expect to tell fire and rescue authorities how to run their service. But there will be some areas where, from time to time, the Government does need to set parameters about how things should be done" (p.30).

Prescott's claim to be responding to the IRFS is nevertheless contradicted very early in the report when he introduces a non-IRFS reference;

*"We will now set national objectives for the fire and rescue service outlining what we expect it to achieve. We believe that a **regional perspective is more appropriate** for fire authorities. We will establish, as soon as is practicable, regional fire and rescue*

authorities in those regions that choose to have elected regional assemblies. Elsewhere we want to see regional management” (p.7).

By mid-2003 regional governance (c.f Section 4.9.2), was becoming a politically moribund policy. However, the ‘Our Fire and Rescue Service’ White Paper sees it return to the ODPM agenda. Prescott’s ‘regional perspective’ was promoted to the forefront of the White Paper from the outset, when he suggests that the regional approach is now more appropriate for fire authorities. The ODPM, referenced Bain’s IRFS report 41 times in 80 pages, suggesting it was an authoritative and independent review, yet it did not recommended the key policy which was now driving the White Paper. Without any further consultation or research, major regional restructuring of the fire service had found its way into the legislative process that begins the so-called tool of participatory democracy (Doerr, 1971), the White Paper.

Specific attention to control rooms’ regionalisation entered the narrative of the White Paper in Chapter 3. This is where the important link was made between Bain’s IRFS structural reform recommendations, which excluded control rooms, to Prescott’s regional policy agenda. Recalling that Bain had mirrored the language of Blair’s 2001 Labour Manifesto in which he vaguely said:

“Some functions are best tackled at the regional level. Economic development is the core of regional policy today” (Blair, 2001).

Bain had also vaguely talked on some functions in the IRFS;

“These are some functions best handled above brigade level” (Bain et.al, 2002, p.iv).

Prescott again vaguely continues with the theme that some matters are best decided at regional level (see below). However, all three documents (2001 Labour Party Manifesto, IRFS and the White Paper) fail to actually list the functions or matters best decided at regional level, or the evidence to support the claim. The White Paper said it would set national standards, adding the nebulous line about leaving matters to regional management levels. However, as regional management levels did not actually exist, was this benevolently worded statement a veiled directive from the ODPM?

“The Government will set national objectives for the fire and rescue service, although we will not dictate matters that are best decided at regional or local level. The current

structural arrangements of the service are in need of reform. Many functions are currently not carried out in a cost-effective way. For example, the cost of local-level control room cover can be as high as £168 per incident handled, compared to £18 per incident in London” (p.27)

In making the tenuous link, the ODPM fails to elucidate on how ‘matters that are best decided at regional or local level’ would be determined. Despite the evidence trail, the ‘matter’ of control room regionalisation was about to be determined by the ODPM, having not been part of Bain’s terms of reference. Advocating regional policy by linking the reports in this way gives false evidence to the claims, without reference to any evidence based modelling that *“larger units are required to run the new fire and rescue service”* (p.32). Now referring directly to regionalisation, the White Paper states the Government’s proposals to create Regional Management Boards where regional assemblies were not established, and provocatively warned that

“..if these arrangements do not deliver modernisation quickly, we will use our powers to require combinations of fire authorities, in order to establish regional fire and rescue authorities” (p. 33).

The tone is markedly less benevolent and demonstrates the growing agency of the Government in the midst of the on-going pay dispute.

In contrast to Bain’s frustrated, paternal critique of the fire service, which had lamented the lack of take-up of initiatives from previous reports and the unacceptable domestic fire risk that existed in the community, the White Paper gives examples of change that was happening in the fire service. For example, the report talks of initiatives to improve community fire safety resulting directly from previous policy and reports, featuring mini case studies at Kent and Surrey Fire Services for example. Like Bain, however, the White Paper selectively revealed examples of where and how unions and fire staff had obstructed progress towards modernisation whilst omitting cases where their involvement had enabled progress. For example in the major fire service policy changes introduced by the Civil Contingencies Act and the New Dimensions and Search and Rescue initiatives.

“These programmes have been designed nationally through close co-operation between central Government and fire authority representatives, and they will be delivered on the ground by means of close working with stakeholders in their communities” (p.24).

In fact, not only had unions not impeded such reforms but such reforms had already started to change the face of the fire service and firefighting since 2001 after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. For example, since 2001 and the build-up to the 2004 Civil Contingencies Act, fire services undertook to make considerable changes towards being in a continued state of preparedness to respond to major incidents or threats. Since 9/11, under the New Dimensions programme, fire services introduced wide-scale changes to training and standardised procedures to deal with terrorist attacks and major environmental disasters. These important changes being made across the fire service were omitted by the Bain review six months earlier and would also be omitted in the subsequent consultant report into the future of control rooms, both of which portended to conditions of inertia and reluctance to modernise.

Like Bain, the White Paper criticises the ability of the fire service to be able to respond to major incidents in light of 9/11. It is interesting to note that despite the White Paper allegedly responding directly to the findings of the IRFS, Bain would mention terrorism and regional solutions to terrorism only three and 28 times respectively. The White Paper, however, created a new focus on these topics, making increased reference to terrorism (17 times) and regional solutions to terrorism (97 times). In addition, vague and unsubstantiated statements inferred that local fire services were reluctant to partake in major incidents;

“Many of the service’s new functions, particularly in relation to responding to terrorism, cannot be carried out properly at local level” (p.15)

“Even where central Government has had a clear idea of what it wanted the service to do – such as taking on more responsibility for responding to the threats of increased terrorism or of biochemical contamination – it has had no way of ensuring that authorities would play their part” (p.29)

Again, both reports omit any reference to the more frequently occurring major incidents (than incidents of the 9/11 scale) that the fire services had responded to for decades (e.g. Lockerbie²⁵, Kings Cross²⁶ and Bradford City football stadium²⁷ disasters and the 55 IRA terrorist attacks

²⁵ 21 December 1988, the wreckage of Pan Am Flight 103 crashed after a terrorist bomb on board detonated, killing 270.

²⁶ 18 November 1987, a fire at King’s Cross St. Pancras tube station, killed 31 people and injured 100 people

²⁷ 11 May 1985, a fire at Bradford City killed 56 and injured at least 265

between 1971 and 2000²⁸). Nevertheless, the general theme of the White Paper is that the fire service was not best-fit for its purpose, and lay the blame with the service for its inadequacies.

By the time of the White Paper, the National Coordination Centre had also been established in direct response to 9/11, the New Dimensions (anti-terrorist equipment, training and operating procedures) initiative was well under way in the fire service and the 2003 counter terrorism budget £330m²⁹. Thus, much was already available to enhance responses to potential major terrorist or weather incidents. However, the White Paper's rhetoric continued to describe fire service shortfall in this respect as if the public would be in danger because of fire service structures and cultures. Ironically, since 9/11, the Ministry of Defence had been strategizing on dealing with terror threats, national security and preparedness (HC 465-I, 1st July 2004), and the fire service did not feature in any of their reports as being responsible for national security, despite the rhetoric of the White Paper and the IRFS.

4.16.2 The royal 'we'

What is useful to appreciate in the search for hidden meaning is the continuous reference the White Paper makes to 'we'. This is a taken-for-granted approach in Government documents which suggests a collective opinion, yet the 'we' are not identified, nor is their authority, nor any evidence to substantiate 'their' new expectations.

"We expect democratic fire and rescue authorities, which will increasingly take a regional perspective, to take key strategic decisions about how the service operates within their area, based on expert professional advice and following consultation with their local communities" (p.7);

"We believe that a regional perspective is more appropriate for fire authorities (p.7);

"Elsewhere we want to see regional management boards for those parts of the service that are best managed regionally" (p.8).

²⁹ "Budget at a glance" BBC News 9th April 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/2932263.stm. Retrieved 09/10/2015

4.16.3 Fudging the figures to suit the ideology

The White Paper makes the statement;

“Too many small authorities are struggling to provide a cost-effective service. That can make achieving economies of scale difficult: for example, the cost of fire control rooms handling a fire incident can be anything between £18 and £168” (p.7).

In its 2000 report Mott MacDonald had suggested that in a typical rural brigade control room the staff cost of handling an incident would be about £50, compared with £18 for the London Fire Brigade, which has one large control room for the whole of the London area. The White Paper, however, used the higher figure of £168 per incident but concealed the fact that it related to the tiny and uniquely sized fire service on the Isle of Wight. Instead, it persuasively revealed a hugely disparate cost of service delivery, as if there were numerous (“*too many*”) of such brigades. This information would be more accurate and useful if the ‘extreme’ organisations such as the tiny island brigade and the huge metropolitan brigade had been excluded from the range for what they are, statistical outliers. Then the costs per incident would vary considerably less and give a more accurate indication of scale up or down potential. The paramount significance of both the method and the use of the statement is that originally cost and the economic imperative was the main driver for regionalisation, an imperative that would be replaced with another (modernisation) and another (national security), later in the debates as time revealed the implausibility of the calculations and the cost benefits.

4.16.4 Exaggerated claims

The White Paper is replete with hyperbole, giving no evidence or reference for claims such as (with emphasis added);

*“The changes we set out in this will benefit **everyone**. Communities will be **safer**. The service will be opened up to more members of those communities. The public will receive **better value for money** from its **investment** in the fire and rescue service” (p.11)*

And;

*“The events of 11 September 2001 have given further **new impetus to the need to rationalise** the way in which the fire service resources are used. **Further** work since then supports the case for moving towards **regional-scale** fire control rooms. They would make possible more effective responses to local, regional or national incidents of **any***

scale and complexity, as part of a longer-term strategy for moving towards more joint and shared control rooms with the other emergency services (p. 29).

In fact, none of the 9/11 findings indicated fewer control rooms would have improved the way incidents had been managed during the disaster. The McKinsey Report into 9/11 had identified that one of the key issues contributing to emergency workers not leaving the building before it collapsed, was incident-ground radio communications not control room incident management (McKinsey, 2002). Control rooms have between 2 and 20 operators on at any one time. A room of 100 control room operators would not have been enough for the unprecedented scale of the 9/11 disaster. Such links are misleading and potentially emotive. Moreover, the comment ‘*further work*’ since the 2000 report by Mott MacDonald is also unsubstantiated. However, what is clear is that by the time the White Paper was written in June 2003, regardless of the outcome of further Government reviews (that would be commissioned later that year to *find* optimal solutions for rationalisation), the regional configuration choice for reform was already decided.

4.16.5 Agreement for the regional perspective

So urgent was Prescott to regionalise the fire service, he was unable to wait for democratic agreement for regional assemblies. He appeared to be forcing the fire service to regionalise management and parts of its services, regardless of regional assemblies;

“Local fire authorities will therefore be required to establish, before 1 April 2004, robust regional management arrangements with members from existing fire authorities” (p.33).

Prescott’s assured tone almost negates the need for actual evidence;

*“The regional level is **acknowledged** to be the right operational level for many functions, in particular **securing the safety of the community in the event of terrorist attack** or other major emergencies. Regional operations **will yield management efficiency** savings and will ensure management at the right level and of the right quality to deliver the outcomes we seek in terms of **lives saved**, and less property and environmental damage” (p.32, emphasis added).*

By using the formal and taken-for-granted White Paper process, the Government can gain legitimacy for proposals before legislating for them. Prescott, without waiting for the results of any wider national referendum was setting out his intentions to regionalise the fire service whilst seemingly democratically *inviting* the fire service to begin the process themselves.

However, it was clear that negotiation was not on the agenda. In relation to creating regional management boards to start the regionalisation process, Prescott wrote (emphasis added);

*“We hope that such **voluntary** arrangements will succeed. But if these arrangements do not deliver modernisation quickly, we will **use our powers** to require combinations of fire authorities, in order to establish regional fire and rescue authorities. We will be **strengthening these powers** in the forthcoming fire legislation in order to ensure that such combinations can be achieved more quickly than at present and to allow the Secretary of State to nominate some of the members of the regional combination authorities”*(p. 33).

Prescott was clearly wielding his powers to force regionalism in the fire service. Yet earlier in 2002, his ODPM colleague, the Regions Minister Nick Raynsford, had been less dictatorial. Speaking at the Annual Conference of the Campaign for the English Regions, he gave details of the considerably more democratic mechanism by which the Government would assess the national appetite for regional governance. He said:

“We will seek the views of the people in all eight regions before taking a decision. We will explicitly seek the views of the regional chamber, local authorities, MPs and other key stakeholders” (Raynsford, 2002).

It is interesting to note that after the White Paper was published, the 2003 ODPM Select Committee discussing the fire service had asked Bain about the concerns that the fire service had over proposed large regional control centres, he replied;

“Well, there has been quite a bit of work done on this. First of all, there is obviously a question of how large, etc., and I am not competent to get into that” (Bain, 2003, in ODPM Select Committee Third Report Session 2002-3: The Fire Service, HC 43-1 (CM 6154), p.33).

Not competent to discuss control room size, yet, Prescott had privileged Bain’s views in radically reforming the fire service, including regionalising control rooms. It is this key juncture, where the audit trail for one of New Labour’s tenets of public sector reform modernisation, ‘evidence-based policy-making’, breaks down significantly between the IRFS, the White Paper and the subsequent policy outcome, the FiReControl project.

Prescott used Bain's estimated savings figures from the IRFS to underpin his argument for the economic gains of regionalism;

"Such a regional approach will ensure that service improvement and also greater savings are achieved from regional fire control rooms, from reducing waste in other areas—for example, procurement, training and vehicle maintenance—as well as from rationalising management effort. The Independent Review of the Fire Service estimated that savings of the order of £42 million over the first three years could be achieved in these areas alone." (p.33).

He fails to show how the regional approach would improve public safety, surely the *raison d'être* of the fire service. Again, no evidence was provided to substantiate how a regional approach would achieve the following claim;

"In due course, as elected regional assemblies are established, there will also be savings from regionalisation in terms of reducing the bureaucratic overhead as the number of authorities is reduced. These savings would be over and above those identified by the Independent Review, and so can be recycled into increased fire-prevention measures." (p.33)

Prescott's claims concealed the equally-possible outcome that overheads could increase as an additional level of bureaucracy was added to the fire service. The previous extracts demonstrate how the Government used language devices to reveal what supported their views whilst concealing that which did not. Despite the blatant selectivity, 'Our Fire and Rescue Service White Paper was another of the key texts that was used to 'evidence' the reform. The narrative will now return to the morphogenetic cycle.

4.17 The seeds of Prescott's folly³⁰?

Through spring 2003, two key milestones in the fire dispute were reached;

- May, 2003: Fire Service Bill begins its progress through Parliament

³⁰ "Prescott's folly" (Daily Mail, 10th May 2002), was first seen as a newspaper headline in relation to Prescott's ailing regional policy. It would continue to be used in association with the FiReControl Project from its inception right up until 2013 ("John Prescott's fire centre 'folly' still costing taxpayers millions", Independent, Andrew Grice, 23 July 2013)

- June 2003: Agreement finally reached on the 16 per cent pay increase, with firefighters voting three-to-one in favour. Firefighters receive 4% rise immediately followed by 7% in November and remaining 5% by July 2004 – taking the basic salary to £25,000. Deal includes modernisation of the fire service and consultation about changes.

At this stage, it is important to return to the wider remit of the ODPM and Prescott's regional Government agenda (c.f. Section 4.9.2). Following the publication of his 2002 White Paper; *'Your Region, Your Choice'*, Prescott's ideological passion for decentralism through regionalism continued at best to be challenged, and at worst neglected, across the country and even by his own party. An Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), report *'Monitoring the English Regions'* in May 2002 gives an insight into how Prescott's regional agenda was being received at the time. Responding to his White Paper *'Your Region, Your Choice'*, the ESRC authors said;

"For some the White Paper may have raised as many questions as it answered."

"Did it prepare the ground for a constitutional step forward or signal a dangerous leap into the unknown?"

"For John Prescott and a Government which took some convincing of the case for English devolution...." (Tomaney and Hetherington, 2002, p.1)

The ESRC report provided a summary of the reactions towards the regional governance White Paper from the Conservative party, who were concerned that regional assemblies would take power from local Government, leading to the abolition of county councils. Labour MPs representing their constituencies also expressed concerns. For example, Malcom Moss (NE Cambridgeshire) dismissed the White Paper as a 'sop to the Deputy Prime Minister and the north east' (Westminster Hall Debates, 2002, Col 280) and raised issues about the cost to local Government reorganisation, set up costs for assemblies and the conflict between Government designated regions and historic counties. The Telegraph published comments from the British Chambers of Commerce who said regional assemblies would increase bureaucracy and cost the taxpayer £1.4 Bn. (Johnston, 2002). Despite this public and wide-spread malaise towards his 2002 White Paper on regionalism, Prescott nevertheless continued to promote the policy in his 2003 White Paper on the fire service (*Our Fire and Rescue Service*).

In the White Paper, Prescott's continual cross-referencing to the IRFS (54 times in 70 pages), had helped create a sense that Bain was advocating regionalisation. His next move was to re-commission Government consultants, Mott MacDonald to revisit and 'update' their 2000 control room review (The Future of Control Rooms in England and Wales, 2000), that had concluded regionalisation was *unachievable*, instead recommending small control rooms below a 20,000 incidents per year threshold merge with larger control rooms.

The recommendations of the original Mott MacDonald Future of Control Rooms in England and Wales (2000), report did not support Prescott's regional vision either. Is it surprising then that Prescott commissioned an update just two and a half years on. Prescott justified the update commission on the grounds of needing to account for "*the changed operational environment*" (Mott MacDonald, 2003, p.S-1). Findings of a hermeneutic analysis of this fourth important text will be provided in (Section 4.19).

The move to commission an update to the control room review was swift and timely. By spring 2003, the previously high profile pay dispute was being managed out of the public eye as the Iraq war loomed higher in newspaper headlines. The ongoing pay dispute was 'competing' with headlines of terror and of war in the Middle East since late 2002. The Sun newspaper for example ran these headlines; "*Fire strike a 'gift for terrorists'*" (13 November 2002) and "*Fire union chiefs are Saddam Stooges*" (14 November 2002). A common thread running through the firefighters' dispute was a "mobilisation of bias" (Dinan et.al, 2006, p.310), whereby the FBU was always vulnerable to being portrayed as a narrow, sectional interest, with its concerns about pay and conditions of service. The result was that the public image and strength of message from the FBU weakened and a new situation logic was beginning to develop.

4.18 Morphogenetic perspective

The Government had used a variety of containment strategies, designed to insulate the general public from too much familiarity; the effective exercise of power, where Government had the position and the resources to control the diffusion of information. For example, the Government had misrepresented the FBU's lack of participation in Bain's IRFS as a reluctance to change despite the Union's rational challenge to the credibility and timing of the review, as well the fact they too had commissioned independent consultants to research proposals for reform. The FBU proposals failed to feature in any of the reform debates. In its written evidence to the ODPM Select Committee inquiry the Fire Service (12 July 2006, HC 872-I), which was assembled after the first year of FiReControl project;

1.(a)4

“Two Government commissioned reports from consultants Mott MacDonald the first of which (The Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications in England and Wales, April 2000) recommended a reduction from 49 controls to 21, the second (The Future of Fire & Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales 2003) which recommended 9 new regional controls in England, one new control to serve London. The union produced a detailed response to both reports, the most relevant now being "Out of Control", published by the FBU in May 2004.”

1.(a)5

“We have our own proposals for the creation of a UK-wide network of "Resilience Controls" which we supply as Annexe 2 prior its official public launch on 25 January.”

The White Paper and the inclusion or exclusion of details and evidence from other sources (such as the IRFS and the FBU’s input), had been used by the ODPM to exercise greater power to control the social visibility of contradictions. From late 2002, the Government press office had been publicising their version of objective truth in the absence of any input from the fire service itself. The Government was claiming constitutional legitimacy, as the guardian of the national interests in regard to public sector pay settlements and the need to modernise public services (Dinan at.al, 2006), and they used the Government process (White Papers, commissions), to control this.

As well as revealing Government management consultants’ recommendations whilst concealing alternative management consultants’ proposals commissioned by the FBU (Cap Gemini Ernst & Young, 2002), the Labour Executive had been taking other opportunities to use political rhetoric and weighted language to publicise that which supported their vision, and to ignore that which did not. For example, on 24th November 2002, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown had used his political position to further Labour’s version of events during his address speech to the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), 2002 Annual Conference in Manchester. He discussed the fire service pay dispute, and warned that there must be no going back to *“the bad old inflationary days of the mid-1970s”* (Brown, 2002). In direct response, the CBI Director General, Digby Jones, publically backed the Government, responding the next day in the Guardian. He said the pay dispute situation was lamentable and bad for British investment, saying *"I don't think the Government has mishandled it at all. It*

understands that it is governing for the whole nation. It is important that it stands firm”
(Guardian, n.a, 2002).

On other occasions, such as 25th November, 2002, the Prime Minister in a televised statement to BBC News said he was not prepared to ‘risk the economy’ to appease the firefighters. Prescott used his position in a stage-managed, televised visit to the temporary control rooms set up by the Army during the fire strike. Prescott applauded publically the Army’s efforts in providing fire cover, especially in the midst of the looming Iraq war. The combined effect of this negative publicity further diminished public support for the FBU.

The continued use of strategies to reveal or conceal the full picture as well as effective containment strategies that were deployed from late 2002, including the White Paper, led to the Labour Government gaining ground in the pay dispute. Following the publication of the White Paper, Prescott re-hired Mott MacDonald to review rationalising control rooms. In June 2003 the recommendations of their report, the fourth key reform text, were published. The following sections provide excerpts of the final critical hermeneutic analysis of text four.

Text 4: “The future of control rooms in England and Wales” 2003 update.

4.19 Findings of a critical hermeneutic analysis; the regionalisation imperative

A Freedom of Information request to establish how and at what cost the management consultants, Mott MacDonald were commissioned for both reports (2000 and 2003), was rejected by DCLG. (Appendix 1). A request for further assistance via Lord Heseltine’s office following his ‘No Stone Unturned’ 2014 report into project failure was also rejected (Appendix 2).

For ease of reading only page numbers will be used in this section, since all refer to the single text under hermeneutic analysis here (The Future of Control Rooms and Communications in England and Wales, 2003 Update), unless otherwise referenced.

The Mott MacDonald 2003 update report is structured to present a review of the original 2000 scope (Text #1), against a new landscape, which the report calls the ‘Changed Environment’. This changed environment covers issues and events such as Labour’s Best Value initiative, the

9/11 terrorist attacks, the outcome of the IRFS and changes in modern technology in public service. The themes for the changed environment were defined by the Government.

Contextualising the reform proposals against other organisations, the update report discusses The Ambulance Service, The Police Service and Multi-Service Initiatives in a section called ‘Current Arrangements’, and also features a small range of case studies, four UK and five international, in a section called ‘International and UK Case Studies’.

The report then provides a section on Options Analysis, which concludes;

“The results of comprehensive analysis and cost modelling implicate that rationalisation of fire and rescue service control rooms by means of ‘Vertical Integration’ (Fire-Fire) to a regional configuration is the optimum solution for fire and rescue service control rooms in England with a single control room in Wales” (p.51).

This is followed by a detailed section on the Vertical Integration option, which explores three amalgamation configurations; supra regional (47 control rooms amalgamate to three control rooms; regional (47 to nine), or sub-regional, (47 to 18). The penultimate section of the review discusses the national strategy required for the selected solution and recommends;

“the Government initiate a national strategy to reduce the number of fire and rescue service control rooms by means of Fire-Fire amalgamation to form regional controls which match the Government Offices of the Regions” (p.51).

The final section; Implementation Plan, sets out the basic plan for implementing Mott’s recommended solution.

4.19.1 A fait accompli?

The purpose of the report was to;

“...update the original, with current evidence, information and analysis to inform a national strategy for securing optimum efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of the UK fire and rescue service” (p.2), and that “This report is intended to support future policy decisions” (p.2).

It is therefore clear that the report will inform a ‘national strategy’ for rationalisation. This driver now appears in the report despite no prior consultation and for what is was worth, Bain’s personal opinion to avoid major reorganisation.

4.19.2 Quality evidence?

At the beginning of the report (p.5), we are reassured of the high quality sources informing the review;

“The conclusions made in this report are based on the results of extensive analysis of fact, data and other evidence available to the review team”,

And of the teams’ apparent objectivity, assuring readers that the views;

“.. do not reflect the opinion of individuals”.

Yet like the IRFS, the report is forced to reveal the significant limitations on data gathering due to the on-going industrial dispute and the tight timescales imposed by the Government on the review team;

“Restrictions on access to information and personnel resulting from ongoing discussions between fire and rescue service employers and staff have limited the ability of the review team to complete an exhaustive investigation of UK fire and rescue service control room arrangements”.

It goes on..

“..in addition, limitations on time and the associated practicalities of international site visits confined the team to the study of a limited range of control room models” (p.5).

Despite significant compromises in data gathering, the update claims extensive analysis of fact, data and other evidence.

4.19.3 A changed environment; by whose definition?

The Government decided what would constitute the changed environment in specifying it to commission the consultants. The Terms of Reference for the Mott MacDonald report were;

“To review the Mott MacDonald Report, ‘The Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications in England and Wales’ (April 2000), to verify, amend and update the recommendations and proposed implementation plan for the rationalisation of fire service control rooms in light of the changed operational environment” (p.S-1).

Ironically, despite operational, political, global and technology changes to the environment (defined by the Government), that justified the need for an update, no mention was made of the changed domestic environment affecting the day-to-day delivery of the fire service. For example, rising youth unemployment, ageing housing stock, or the higher numbers of immigrants whose communities were difficult to penetrate with fire safety initiatives (Arson Control Forum, 2004, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service Annual Report, 2003). Had the changing domestic environment featured, this may have indicated the need for greater resources on the ground as had been concluded in the Government's Pathfinder research, which the Government had chosen in the end not to publish as a report in 2003, the year of the IRFS. Challenging the Government's decision to not publish the Pathfinder findings, this early day motion was raised in Parliament (EDM 543 Firefighters' pay negotiations, 2002-03) with 35 of the 43 who signed the motion being from the Labour Party.

- *Date tabled: 20.01.2003*
- *Primary sponsor: Wood, Mike Roy*
- *Sponsors:*

That this House calls on the ODPM to publish the Pathfinder report into the British Fire Service, given that it has already been leaked to Channel 4 news, so that all sides involved in firefighters' pay negotiations, conditions and working practices have access to all current thinking on these issues, particularly those conclusions which contradict the findings of the Bain Inquiry; believes it is unwise for present negotiations to continue based solely on the findings of Bain given the level of contradiction which exists; and expresses grave concern that any deal which is reached relying on Bain's findings alone could cause substantial and lasting damage to the British Fire Service and relations between firefighters and their employers.

The Pathfinder research had looked at 11 brigades over three years. The inquiry concluded that in response to changing domestic needs, the fire service needed *more* resources and spending on brigades in large cities needed a 50% increase in the number of fire engines and firefighters. These findings contradicted Bain's IRFS report, which had talked of reducing the number of resources.

In summing up the chapter; The Changed Environment, Mott MacDonald persuade us to consider a new perspective on rationalisation in light of important changes to;

“The operational, political, economic and technical environment of the fire and rescue service”(p.6).

However, in reality, each of these Government-selected factors was also Government defined and driven. Bain had imposed the operational changes to modernise the service as commissioned by the ODPM under the auspices of helping to address pay and conditions. The report does not elaborate on the actual political environment. As described, the pay dispute had pitted a powerful union against a new political party and the political environment that ensued was now being ‘managed’ by the operational modernisation programme Bain’s IRFS had triggered. The argument for addressing a global political environment related to 9/11 and the validity of this has been discussed. The economic drivers were also Government driven; Blair’s modernisation agenda. The report addresses technology changes by referencing the radio technology that was being rolled out to all emergency services in a separate project called Firelink. Again, the radio technology argument (to introduce a single radio communications platform for all emergency services to be able to interoperate), does not clearly support the drive to urgently rationalise fire control rooms, since this had not been a requirement when the same technology was implemented across the ambulance and police services.

The ‘changed environment’ of Best Value, 9/11, the Firelink project, the IRFS and the modernising of public service were delivery, were in fact political policies, about which Mott MacDonald were able to conclude;

“There is increasing pressure (no source of which is provided) on the fire and rescue service to adapt and adopt new ways of working. Current organisational arrangements constrain the ability of the fire and rescue service to operate effectively (no examples of failure given) and to develop its capability to protect the nation from the new level of threat that the emergency services must now plan for. Change is necessary” (p.19).

The inclusion ‘protecting the nation’ is an important addition to the 2003 rhetoric for modernisation, which becomes associated with the search for an optimum rationalisation solution from here on. Hitherto, apart from the loose link to the 9/11 McKinsey Report (2002), which had predominantly listed inadequate communications and lack of interoperability (issues to be *partly* addressed through Firelink, the radio project), fire services were not tasked with

national security. If this was now a driver for change favouring the regional approach, the choice of regional locations would become absurdly contradictory in the project of achieving national security. Whilst the unit of analysis for this study does not cover the requirements specification of the FiReControl project that ensued in 2005, it is interesting to note the rhetoric of national security in relation to the fact that all nine regional control centres were eventually built next to major motorways. The centres were co-located on large retail or industrial estates and were constructed of aluminium and glass. All of these specifications would undermine the resilience of a centre tasked with national security.

Deeper exploration to reveal how language may conceal meaning (Prasad, 2002), within the section called 'Options Analysis', suggests a similar intention to direct attention to issues and ideas that fit with the dominant political ideologies of that period, whilst diverting attention away from facts which may have supported alternative lines of thinking. This section is arguably one of the most important in its 'analysis' of the 'evidence and data' from which the consultants could now claim to have calculated the optimum and definitive modernisation solution. Within two years from the previous report there are no longer any grey areas between solutions, yet it is difficult to follow the evidence trail that would lead Mott MacDonald to draw such conclusions.

Thematic references/entry points of Best Value, efficiency and resilience were used to read the updated Mott MacDonald (2003) report. Entering the hermeneutic circle and cycling between the text and the political context reveals how language is used to both direct and re-direct attention to and away from key issues.

4.19.4 Resistance to change or flawed policy?

Mott MacDonald's (2003) report highlights the inadequacy of the fire sector for failing to exploit the Government's Best Value policy to make changes towards achieving efficiency following the Local Government Act (1999) as recommended in their first report, in 2000. Yet, the report also appears to blame not just the fire sector for challenging the Best Value principals and being protectionist but suggests the Best Value policy itself is flawed;

"Many of the Best Value Reviews of Control and Communications fail to address the issue of externalisation in earnest. There are varying interpretations as to what this means and many have compared their service with private, commercial agencies with whom the requirements of service delivery are incongruent. Few brigades look to other

brigades as a possible source of externalisation, which is a significant flaw in their approach” (p.7).

Mott McDonald advised;

“Best Value is not suited to the development of a local service to meet national needs and the experience of the fire brigades in completing their BVRs has shown that, contrary to initial expectations, it is not capable of supporting a national strategy to secure efficiency and effectiveness. The lack of central accountability to challenge BVRs and enforce the implementation of initiatives to meet Best Value meant that the production of BVRs was little more than academic in nature.”(p6)

This begs the question, was the patchy implementation of Best Value due to protectionism, which had led Bain to condemn the structures as obstructive to change, or did the fire service fail to embrace those changes due to the inadequacy of the policy?

4.19.5 Creating confusion with 9/11 rhetoric

“The attack on the World Trade Centre (WTC) on September 11th 2001 fundamentally changed the ways in which the UK emergency services operate and the scale, scope and public expectation of their response capability” (p.8),

The rhetoric of a ‘greater public expectation’ is not substantiated; how was this established? More concerning is that Mott MacDonald use what can only be described as 9/11 rhetoric to support the control room rationalisation proposals of the UK Government, without due consideration to the actual detail. The report fails to hone in on the important facts of the 9/11 inquiries, such as the McKinsey Report (2002), which identified lessons learned and recommendations in the wake of the disaster. The objective of the 9/11 reports was to recommend changes to improve preparedness for large-scale incidents. In a Government review by the US Federal Emergency Management Agency, (2002), that summarised nine of the key 9/11 reports, the three most prevalent themes for improving community responses to terrorism and other catastrophic events were given as:

1. **Command and Control.** The need for a pre-planned command structure that establishes security at the site, effectively tracks personnel, and utilizes an incident command system (ICS) in order to establish stability and consistency in operations.

2. **Communications.** The need for interoperable communication equipment and standards on the local, State, and Federal levels to allow first responders to communicate effectively with one another.
3. **Training and Exercises.** The need for first responder training in preparedness, response operations, and interoperable equipment across agencies.

Mott's remit to recommend a solution to best rationalise control rooms, can only loosely be connected to the first theme; Command and Control.³¹ None of these themes lays culpability with control room operators and rooms *per se*. In the report from the US Federal Management Agency (2002), the Command and Control recommendation related to the multiple incident command management structures of different fire departments, which did not interoperate easily at that scale of incident. Difficulties were also faced by poor radio communications at the fire ground of the attacks and the subsequent confusion that arose in locating and deploying personal. The report suggests that on the day, these issues were further affected by the timing of the shift changes coinciding with the disaster leading to many firefighters and officers being available and despatching themselves voluntarily. Though generally related in terms of incident management, the specific 9/11 lessons are distinctly different issues to Mott MacDonald's claims that the existing number of English control rooms would be a barrier to the National Coordination Centre's ability to coordinate fire services, if faced with a similar incident and that fewer control rooms would resolve this problem. The links are both unsubstantiated and tenuous. Responding to this section of the Mott MacDonald report, the FBU welcomed wider civil contingencies planning and a National Co-ordination Centre to facilitate movement and support for a large number of resources. However, the FBU challenged the idea that its operation would be undermined by local emergency fire service controls' organisational arrangements and operational protocols, stating in their 'Out of Control' (2003) response to the Mott MacDonald report;

"The organisational arrangements and operational protocols of the Fire and Rescue Service are driven by Fire-fighter's requirements at incidents and not issues relating to Emergency Fire Service Controls. Emergency Fire Service Controls would expect the national co-ordination centre to deliver national direction and as such would respond in

³¹ The 1988 NATO definition: Command and control is the exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated [individual] over assigned [resources] in the accomplishment of a [common goal], www.nato.int accessed 27/04/15

their usual professional manner. Emergency Fire Controls are not a barrier to implementation of national strategies and guidance. They are part and parcel of the system that delivers them” (FBU, 2003, p.9).

As with the previous Government reports (IRFS, Our Fire and Rescue Service White Paper), Mott MacDonald also failed to acknowledge the reality that the fire service frequently attended and managed successfully, large-scale incidents, including terrorism, albeit not on the unprecedented scale of 9/11. Mott MacDonald listed the new Government initiatives for dealing with large-scale incidents, such as the Civil Contingencies Programme, the New Dimensions Programme and the National Co-ordination Centre (NCC), which had been developed to provide strategic direction to the emergency services in the event of a major incident. However, in rhetorical fashion and in the absence of any sourced evidence, the report creates a sense that control rooms would struggle to work with these new coordinating agencies. The following statement illustrates this point;

“Current divergence between the size and operational capacity of fire controls has led to differences in levels of staff training and experience. Such is likely to introduce significant resource problems between small and large brigades, undermining their ability to provide a collective and cohesive response to New Dimension incidents in which resources from multiple brigades may be required” (p.9).

The report diverts attention towards Government perspectives by totally omitting the fact the fire service had a long history of dealing with large scale incidents, including terrorism and were already working with the new agencies by June 2003 when the report was published. In responding to this omission the FBU said;

“All Emergency Fire Controls have been fully versed and trained in the response to New Dimension mass decontamination incidents. They have been fully briefed in the role and use of New Dimension equipment and the procedures and protocols and support required. The Fire and Rescue Service takes very seriously its expanding role and as such is constantly reviewing, changing and adapting procedures and Emergency Fire Controls are critical in this process”(FBU, 2003, p.10).

Linking 9/11 findings with unsubstantiated statements reflects the methods used in the report to divert attention and conceal facts. The following statement under the heading ‘Interoperability’;

“A further consequence of September 11th 2001 and the subsequent requirements of New Dimension is the need for enhanced interoperability within the fire and rescue service and with other emergency services in the context of communications”, (p.10).

links a 9/11 issue relating to poor interoperability to the size of control rooms; a link which was not made in any of the 9/11 reports. Nevertheless, Mott MacDonald claim;

“Larger control rooms would interface with and be more easily managed by the National Co-ordination Centre in the event of a major incident” (p.10).

This assumption infers that a larger control room, with arguably fewer overall control staff numbers on duty for the wider region (using the staffing economy of scale and economic arguments of previous reports), would somehow deliver interoperability, a key issue in 9/11.

The report cites Bain’s IRFS (2002), which advised as a matter of priority that the Government should establish a strategic level, high capability co-ordination infrastructure to deal with the New Dimension work. Yet, that was the role of the newly established National Coordination Centre (NCC). That the NCC was created to provide such a national function is played down in the Mott MacDonald report but in a statement that is unsupported by evidence it claims;

“The current 49 control rooms present a barrier to this centre” (p.9)

And rhetorically infers obstructive behaviour;

“There is currently no statutory responsibility on fire brigades to operate collaboratively or in a common operational environment” (p.9)

Such statements serve to divert our attention away from facts, such as the relative rarity of large-scale incidents, which the dedicated NCC was established to coordinate, and the lack of any examples where local fire services had obstructed collaboration at large scale incidents. Moreover, whilst there were (are) no statutory obligations to collaborate, equally there is no evidence offered which says in such events fire services did not cooperate. The NCC (now called the FRSNCC³²) coordinates and deploys national resilience resources (housed and utilised by local fire services) to large-scale incidents.

³² FRSNCC (Fire and Rescue Service National Coordination Centre) is part of the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) National Resilience remit.

4.19.6 Options analysis; a changed environment but same model criteria

VERTICAL INTEGRATION	
Supra-Regional Controls	The amalgamation of fire and rescue control rooms in England and Wales to create three supra-regional controls
Regional Controls	The amalgamation of fire and rescue control rooms in England and Wales to create a regional arrangements in accordance with the Government Offices for the Regions
Sub-regional Controls	The amalgamation of fire and rescue control rooms in England and Wales on the basis of a 30,000 call threshold. This would result in 18 sub-regional controls.

Table 7. Options available in amalgamating fire-with-fire service organisations (Mott MacDonald, 2003)

The 2003 update report was intended to advise Government on the best way to meet the future requirements of control rooms. The options available under the preferred fire-with-fire (vertical integration, as opposed to fire-with-police etc. as in horizontal integration), are described in Table 7. Mott MacDonald's analysis of options was based on four criteria:

- Requirements; ability to meet the requirements of the changed environment
- Experiential; lessons learned from outcomes of various control arrangements
- Qualitative; service delivery impact, organisational development impact, barriers to implementation and other associated issues and opportunities
- Cost; possible savings that would be available.

Of particular interest and import to the final selection of an option (for the future of control rooms) was the language used in discussing the qualitative criteria for each solution. Qualitative criteria was based on the three dimensional model that had been introduced in the original 2000 report, as below. In the 2003 update report, Mott said:

“This model has been adopted for the purpose of this report and used as a means of determining which option(s) are most appropriate in today's environment.” (p.2)

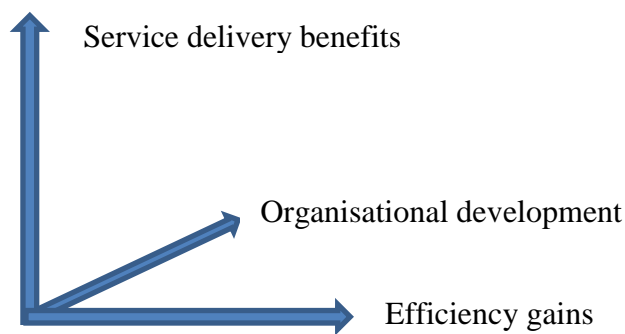


Figure 13. Model to measure Qualitative Criteria, (p.2)

The model was instrumental in helping Mott MacDonald make recommendations in their 2000 report seeking efficiency that had led to recommendations for small control rooms join with larger ones for optimal efficiency gains. It is not possible to determine if this was the best model to inform that recommendation. However, in light of a ‘changed environment’ (including national security post 9/11, that was highlighted as a new imperative), was the model to measure efficiency suited to measuring qualitative criteria to inform a new decision?

The ‘Options Analysis’ chapter of the report is of considerable importance, given the impact of the change its conclusions ‘informed’, yet the language used by the authors is both inconsistent and biased in describing negative and positive features. Issues that similarly affect all three solutions are variously described with considerably different language that underplays, overplays, or omits impact and in so doing directs the focus of the reader. For example, moving from local control room arrangements to regional, which would in effect mean merging five organisations into one centre, is a complex challenge and one likely to result in job losses and managerial conflict. Likewise, this is also true of merging a greater or fewer number of control rooms into one organisation as in supra-regional or sub-regional options. However, the choice of more positive language to express such issues when associated with the regional solution is evident. For example, where the job losses, managerial conflict and need for legislation to implement the reform are all considered more manageable or expressed more positively. The report describes the barriers for implementation in relation to job losses at each option. The estimated job losses for a regional option were 572 (p.43). Mott MacDonald said of this number;

“Some resistance likely as a result of anticipated job losses and changes in staff conditions, such as location. May be mitigated by improved working conditions and redeployment.” (p.43)

For the supra-regional (3 control rooms), the job loss was estimated as 625 (p.42). Based on some threshold of tolerance, which it seems the consultants have introduced but not shared with the reader, Mott MacDonald said of this option;

“Barriers to implementation would be onerous since they would likely result in extensive job losses and require existing staff to significantly change working location.” (p.42)

When describing barriers to implementation in relation to job losses at the sub-regional option (reducing to 18 control rooms, which was closer to Mott MacDonald’s original 2000 recommendations), they said there may be;

“Some staff resistance due to anticipated job losses although likely not as significant as other options.” (p.43).

However, interestingly now, in 2003 Mott MacDonald now expressed concern about this last option because, now it seemed;

“Management arrangements between brigades may be difficult to deliver” (p.43).

The evidence to underpin the barriers to implementation claims is not provided in any detail. We are to assume that the consultants gained this data from their second review; though they stated clearly, this was significantly restricted due to the industrial dispute and in fact, they spoke to just 90 operational staff. In a single metropolitan service alone there are on average 1200 operational staff and small county services average 400 (Corby, 2003), therefore across 47 organisations, the number of operational staff consulted from which to gauge views from that perspective is limited. There is no mention of how the consultants arrived at the conclusion that 625 job losses would be considered extensive and obstructive to implementation but 570 or 365 (solutions 1 and 2 respectively), would not. Similarly, claims that resulted in the differentiation of the solutions, such as *“management based on a local structure may be a source of contention”* (p.41,) helps to rule out the sub-regional solution. This was the preferred solution of the Mott MacDonald 2000 report, yet there is no mention that management based on a regional solution. Table 8 presents a section of the language used throughout the ‘Qualitative Analysis’ of the three solutions against the three dimensional model of criteria measured. Comment boxes are used to highlight inconsistencies and language choices which direct or redirect our attention and in so doing emphasise or minimise meaning for the reader.

CRITERIA	Service Delivery Impact Positive:	Service Delivery Impact Negative:	Organisation development Positive:	Organisation development Negatives:	Barriers to Implementation
S1: SUPRA-REGIONAL (3 Control Centres)	Improved ability to deal with large-scale incidents and manage cross border operations.	Significant increase in workload; Reduced resilience. Feelings of detachment	Potential to rationalise practices on a national scale	Potential management difficulties/national management structure, would take time/limit career progression	Barriers to implementation would be onerous since they would likely result in extensive job losses (625)
S2: REGIONAL (9 Control Centres)	Provide a regional response capability and improved cross-border operations whilst maintaining a local focus.	Differences between brigades would remain – but this could be overcome	Rationalisation and adoption of best practice on a regional scale. • enhanced career opportunities and job satisfaction	Would require central/national direction with appropriate legislative power to implement. •	Resistance likely as a result of anticipated job losses (570)
S3: SUB-REGIONAL (18 Control Centres)	Joint arrangement is possible with other emergency services. Least disruptive of all vertical models and therefore offers the least resistance to implementation	Less able to provide regional/national response capability.	Maintains opportunity for future of Shared or Joint arrangements with other services. • Maintains strong links between brigades and control.	May maintain some differences between brigades. Less able to provide a regional/national response capability. • Management based on a local structure, may be source of contention between brigades.	Some staff resistance due to anticipated job losses although likely not as significant as other options (365). Surmised possibilities using negative rhetoric. Yet, these issues are considered positive possibilities in the S2 option.

Table 8. Options Analysis: Qualitative Criteria

Can be said for all solutions just to a differing degree

Workload increase for all solutions if in failover mode, especially also true for S2: regional solution, a whole region's worth of calls is also significant workload in failover

Can be said for all solutions just to a differing degree but language emphasises S2 option as better

Now expressed neutrally as a resolution, in S1 it was negative rhetoric 'feelings of detachment'

4.19.7 Options analysis: the ideology of cost

In choosing the optimum solution by which to reduce control rooms in the strategy to rationalise fire services, the next important analysis consideration was cost and the savings that would be made available through the various options. Unfortunately, as with the IRFS and other chapters of the update, the report advises (p.45);

“The political situation has meant that all the information we would have ideally wanted was not available to us, however, we have obtained ‘sufficient evidence’ from other sources to ensure the conclusions reached are robust”

However, in what is arguably one of the most vital elements of solution evaluation in reforming national emergency services, there are no references to identify exactly which sources *did* inform the cost modelling exercise. Despite the criticality of this section, we are again reminded of the limitations of the data gathering exercise.

The cost modelling for the various solutions is largely based on the ratio of incident numbers to staffing as control room scenarios are scaled up through the various amalgamation scenarios. Complexities that would undoubtedly be characteristic of such reforms, such as impact on capital charges or payment profiles are deliberately excluded from the model;

“..due to the array of uncertainties surrounding timetables for implementation”(p.124).

However, those same uncertainties surrounding timetables for staffing reductions would almost definitely apply yet costs associated with phasing such reductions are not addressed when costs for staffing are calculated.

This Mott MacDonald 2003 report was commissioned to account for the Government’s version of a ‘changed environment’, which was to include the significant operational changes that had resulted from the Government-commissioned IRFS of 2002. These changes included control room and firefighter staff responding to a wider range of incidents, such as rescue and other special incidents under the New Dimensions initiative.

However, and crucially, the source of the incident data used to inform the cost model, the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), was dated 2000/2001. There are several problems here. CIPFA provides of public sector services and resources statistics based on retrospective annual data provided by fire services to the Government. Therefore, data of 2000/2001 data represents the previous year. The data is the key component for modelling costs. However, modelling the cost of the solutions for Mott MacDonald’s 2003

report, based on activity data that was in effect more than four years old. This report was supposed to be addressing the changed environment from that original 2000 report, making the cost model both inadequate and indeed inaccurate. However, the language used in the report omits the relevance of this fundamental data issue;

“The data and methodology used in this model reflects that used previously to ensure consistency in approach”, (p124)

Instead, the language conveys a sense of robust and principled research methods, which ultimately conceals relevant information that may affect the final costs and thus the option chosen.

The use of passive language, such as ‘does not appear’ not only relieves the authors of responsibility, but infers objectivity. It is as if the data now speaks for itself;

“The analysis shows that the costs associated with establishing and continuing to operate a reduced number (but larger in size) of control rooms is less than the costs of maintaining and upgrading control rooms in the existing arrangement. Combining this with staff savings resulting from increasing economies of scale the analysis concludes that amalgamating control rooms to either ‘Supra’ or ‘Regional’ level is likely to result in the freeing up of major capital and revenue funds within the fire service over the 10 year period and beyond. From a financial perspective to continue with existing arrangements does not appear to be an option that can be justified” (p. 49);

With little evidence to link the paragraphs the report strongly concludes the optimal solution for the future of control rooms to manage any incidents of any scale or complexity is the regional solution;

“Overall, the results of the analyses strongly demonstrate that a regional approach is the optimum solution for the future of fire and rescue service control rooms in England and Wales. This would secure and maximise the realisable efficiency gains, whilst enabling fire and rescue services to work effectively together to provide a local, regional or national response to incidents of any scale and complexity” (p.49).

4.19.8 All roads point to the regions; but only the GORs!³³

The penultimate section of the report; ‘A National Approach’ indicates Mott MacDonald’s compelling support for a national strategy by which to reform the fire service using the Government regions’ configuration, which their analyses had concluded optimal. Despite the questionable sources of the fundamentally important statistical data, as well as the model used to calculate costs and the consultants own numerous references to shortfalls in accessing data and participants, their report concludes (emphasis added);

*“The results of **comprehensive** analysis and cost modelling implicate that rationalisation of fire and rescue service control rooms by means of ‘Vertical Integration’ (Fire-Fire) to a **regional configuration is the optimum solution** for fire and rescue service control rooms in England with a single control room in Wales. This is considered to be the **most appropriate way forward to secure maximum gain** along each of the three axes identified in the analysis model whilst mitigating barriers to implementation and risk to operations”* (p.49).

*“The most appropriate configuration for fire and rescue control regions is considered to be in accordance with the **Government Offices for the Regions** Aligning fire service control rooms to the Government Regions will help overcome issues associated with funding, ownership and accountability whilst securing significant cost saving”* (p.50).

On the basis of minimal factual evidence and financial modelling that omitted to cost in the ‘changed environment’ that had apparently necessitated the update to the report, without quantifying any of the frequently proposed benefits, a solution to site new control rooms in the Government offices for the regions (GORs had been established across England in 1994), was justified.

The report further justifies the regional centres by subtly referring to newly perceived barriers about ownership and accountability of new control rooms, urging readers to accept that the use of non-brigade sites would overcome perceived managerial issues that may ensue because of amalgamation. Mott perceived managerial issues as likely to occur in all but a Government office regional solution, citing this isolated example as justification;

³³ Nine Government offices for the regions (GORs) were established across England in 1994.

“In the case of South Wales, the building of a brand new facility as opposed to locating the new control within one of the existing brigade controls, was seen as a significant advantage since it marked the initiation of a new organisation rather than being perceived as an extension of an existing one” (p.54).

No source reference is provided for this opinion. Meanwhile, in the wider political environment, in a departure from the persuasive and unchallenged language used in the Mott MacDonald reports, the concept of regional Government was evidently still not prospering during the same period.

“Despite 90% overall opposition to the policy, and 75% from business, John Prescott transferred county councils' housing planning powers to (unelected) regional bodies”. (The Telegraph, 19.7.02).

“New Labour's mania for uprooting local Government hit trouble after 15 out of 22 referendums rejected "continental" elected mayors, at a cost of £2.5m and turnouts averaging 30%” (The Times, 19.7.02).

In response to the Mott MacDonald 2003 report, the Minister for Local Government, Regional Governance and Fire, Nick Raynsford said (emphasis added);

“The Government is persuaded by the conclusions of the study and proposes to establish regional control rooms in England, including the one already established in London, working closely with Fire and Rescue Authorities through their Regional Management Boards. We have written to the Practitioners Forum asking for their views on our proposed approach” (HC Deb 11th December 2003, c97WS).

After a long and drawn out journey through industrial disputes, industry reviews and public battles between union leaders and politicians, the decision for regional control rooms was now concluded by the Fire Minister.

4. 20 Summary and morphogenetic perspective of T²-T³

At the end of T³, what had begun as a new Government's attempts to increase efficiency and modernise working practices in a corporatist, routinised fire service, using the Best Value initiative (Local Government Act, 1999), had ended four years later after bitter conflict and

polarisation of views. Early socio-cultural interactions at T² had been infused by New Labour's ideas on public management, emerging from the new democratic movement. The situational logic of the new Government, called for *correction* from the *necessary contradictions* stemming from the comfortable tripartite arrangement that had developed between employers, managers and the FBU. In this arrangement, vested interests had been protected for decades, resulting in reproduction of the structural and cultural systems and a resistance to externally imposed change. The newly established Office of the Deputy Prime under the leadership of John Prescott MP, undertook to impose such changes which were based on the new democratic politics of Prime Minister, Tony Blair. However, up to 2000, no significant cultural or structural changes took place beyond a form of compromise. Fire services responded to Best Value, submitting statistics and service reviews back to the ODPM as required (Audit Commission, 2000), but there had been no dramatic changes through inter-organisational collaborations as recommended (Mott MacDonald, 2000).

Based on growing disquiet around the country in relation to fire service pay, in May 2002, the Fire Brigade Union, representing a large number of employers, delivered a 40% pay claim to its local Government employers. The conditioning effects of T¹ had positioned the FBU as the dominant group in relation to the new Government group, whose agents were still developing new roles within their new departments. However, despite relative dominance, the FBU leadership entered into a period of *compromise*, accommodating negotiations with employers and accepting the considerably lower 16% pay offer (July, 2002) that would eventually be withdrawn as the Government intervened (November, 2002). As battle lines were drawn, the situational logic of *elimination* developed predisposing the FBU to polarise and compete. The union harnessed the support of its members for all out strike action, weakening the Government as competing factions of old Labour (traditionally in support of the trades unions) clashed with the ideas of New Labour MPs, expounding neo-liberalist views on public sector management.

Individually, Tony Blair and John Prescott vied for authority in their respective domains as the FBU called for industrial action and the army were despatched to provide fire cover for the first time in twenty years. Not only was Blair's modernisation agenda being challenged but, following the events of 9/11, and involving the UK in Iraq, controversially, Blair had also agreed to send Army troops to fight. Meanwhile, on another political agenda, John Prescott was working hard to persuade the country that decentralism through regional assemblies was the way forward for Government. Throughout the later stages of T² to T³, in a series of media managed communications and effective deployment of rhetoric, the Labour executive began to

build legitimacy for their goals. Intervening in local Government business by commissioning an independent review of the fire service on the eve of national strikes, despite significant research limitations, not only delayed decision making but developed a powerful tool for the Government to use in the battle to modernise Blair's way. Removing Prescott from the dispute at a crucial moment when the Government were losing ground and deploying union-friendly MPs to hold the fort may also be viewed as delay tactics, whilst other avenues were developed. When Prescott re-emerged with the White Paper, threatening to increase Government powers of legislation to end the dispute, the shifting situational logics between correction and elimination resulted in oscillating interactions at the structural level to maintain vested interests. Ordering an update of the Mott MacDonald report, which had originally concluded regionalisation to be unachievable, served the ODPM well. By 2003 Mott MacDonald were able to fully support the new Government narrative of regionalisation and national security.

4.21 T⁴ Socio-Cultural Elaboration: 2004 onwards

4.21.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to demarcate the final phase of the morphogenetic sequence. This stage offers explanatory power because it manifests what is to be explained of relations and power, which are both irreducible to but temporally anchored amidst the levels of reality (Archer, 1995). The relations and power outcomes of previously conditioned socio cultural interactions, result in either elaboration or stasis that in turn provides the temporal starting-point of a new conditioning sequence (ibid). The cycle described in this study is morphogenetic (as opposed to morphostatic); changes to structures and to cultures (structural and cultural elaborations), occurred, though not in exact tandem, as will be discussed in this section. Socio-cultural interactions between T² and T³ were governed by a “cleavage of intractable differences” (Nihija and Merali, 2013, p.895) between the FBU and New Labour. Discord between emerging agents within a new Government and the leadership of the longstanding institutions of the fire service and the FBU led to changes in agency. The mediating effects of these varying levels of agency are described between T² and T⁴ and the outcomes in terms of structural and cultural transformation will now be discussed. How agency was itself transformed throughout the interactions, enabling or constraining the power of various actors or groups to act will be discussed in the Chapter 5.

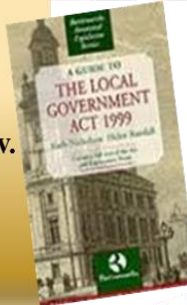
The cycle began at T¹, designated as prior to 1999, where we find conditioning influences of pre-existing structures and cultures of the time. The effects of agential interactions delineated in this study as T²:1999 to T³:2004, gave rise to structural and cultural elaboration at T⁴, post 2004. The structural and cultural elaborations and the power by which change was effected were facilitated by agency. However, agents in return were also affected, resulting in the double morphogenesis of agency; agents were both influential to and influenced by the interactions. The cycle is summarised pictorially in Figure 14 below and in more detail in Table 9.

Figure 14. The morphogenetic cycle for the study, in brief and in pictures

Structural conditioning Pre 2000

T¹

Post Thatcher
Fire service
corporatism
Powerful FBU
Blair's New Labour, new
democratic
politics still
weak
**1999 Local Gov.
Act**
Best Value,
**delivers no
structural**



Social interactions 2000 to 2004

T² to T³

National pay
disputes
All out strikes
New Labour v FBU
ideological clash,
Blair, Prescott,
Brown,
'Modernisation'
'Regionalism'
9/11
Powerful building
of Agency through
legitimation of
ideas:
Bain Review of Fire
Service
Management
consultants
New breed of CFOs
Gov't **White Paper**



Structural elaboration Post 2004

T⁴

**2004 Fire Service
Act**

Radical restructuring
Bain review used to
support far wider
reforms....

**Gov consultant
reports** to 'design
best' solution....
Regionalisation of
control rooms
(**FIRECONTROL
PROJECT**) paving the
way for regional fire
services



FiReControl

a national project delivered regionally

Pre 1999	2000 to 2004	2004 onwards
Structural conditioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire service corporatism • Collective bargaining • All vested interests served • Peripheral disquiet about pay issues at local brigades • Early days of Blair's New Labour, new democratic politics and new public sector management policies • 1999 Local Gov. Act • Mott MacDonald Best Value review advocates New Labour's economic imperative for modernisation in control rooms, recommends collaboration of small brigades with big ones. • Fire service response: containment, service engages with Best Value minimally, little structural change • Interests begin to diverge 	Social interactions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New breed of Chief Fire Offices with managerialist behaviours, • Peripheral pay issue now a national dispute • New Labour v FBU ideological clash, situational logics of competition as both consider alternatives: • Bain Review recommends radical modernisation similar to Blair's agenda, before any pay increase • FBU votes for strike action • Army provides fire cover • 9/11, Iraq war, • ODPM publishes White Paper mirroring Bain Report proposing radical reforms and introduces a new imperative for modernisation using 9/11 links; national security. • White Paper introduces fire service regionalisation, now stated as critical key change, despite lack of evidence or support for it in previous reports • Prescott and regionalisation agenda 	Structural elaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2004 Fire Service Act • Legislates for radical restructuring of the fire service, includes clauses to combine fire authorities into regions. • Mott MacDonald re-hired to 'update' their previous recommendations for finding efficiency in control rooms of England due to 'a changed environment' post 9/11. They endorse structural reforms via regionalisation. FiReControl project is approved within the year. Cultural elaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Act legislates for changes to duty systems, recruitment, diversity (the areas that had remained unchanged for decades, reproducing corporatist behaviours and cultures). It imposed new performance targets and measurements that required new managerial processes to operate; cultural ways begin to change
T ¹	T ²	T ³
		T ⁴

Table 9. Pre-existing conditions at T¹, interactions at T² to T³, consequences and outcomes at T⁴

4.21.2 The Fire Service Act, 2004

The structural elaboration of the fire service came in the form of the 2004 Fire Service Act and its subsequent legislation in the Fire Service Bill, 2004. Notwithstanding the conflicts and industrial dispute between 2002 and early 2003 and despite some challenge in mid-November 2003 over the Fire Services Bill, in which 41 Labour MPs voted against it, when the Act was finally passed it went almost entirely unreported in the media, (Cowley and Stuart, 2004).

Caroline Spelman MP in a House of Commons (2005) speech on regionalisation, said this;

“The very manner in which the regionalisation of emergency services was slipped out in the press over the summer recess shows just how sheepish the Government is about this announcement. I am sure colleagues on both sides of the House will, like me, have received lots of letters from people rightly concerned about the implications of this latest experiment in restructuring. In fact looking at the number of colleagues who have signed EDM 229, at least 219 of them agree with these concerns. Without any statement having been made to the House on these changes I have had to rely on press reports and it seems that the number of fire control rooms are being cut from 46 to 9,” (HC Deb 12 October, 2005).

4.21.3 Structural changes

Structurally, the 2004 Fire Service Act introduced a raft of changes to working practices such as overtime, duty systems and part-time working. It abolished organisations such as the Central Fire Brigade’s Advisory Council and shifted responsibilities to other agencies the Government had established under its modernisation agenda, such as the Practitioners Forum and the Business and Community Safety Forum. The Act removed restrictions that previously prevented Government from intervening in pay disputes. It gave Government substantially increased control over the fire service. The Government were empowered to direct the fire service over its strategic objectives, as well as the use of its assets such as fire stations, where they should be, if they should close, and in increasing or reducing the number of fire-fighters. The fire minister or secretary of state was given powers to impose pay and conditions in line with Home Office control over the police service. Part of the managerialist consolidation of the 2004 Fire Service Act, were the changes introduced with the audit/inspection frameworks that reflected the new public management themes of Blair’s modernised public service.

What is important to this study is the search for causal mechanisms that contributed to the failure of the fire service reform project called FiReControl. The intention was to look beyond

traditional spheres of inquiry. The timeframe here designated as T¹ to T⁴ is that other place. The 2004 Fire Service Act was the T⁴ outcome of the complex social interactions (T² to T³), that took place between 2000 and 2004, mediated by pre-existing conditions at T¹. In relation to the intention of this inquiry, what is important about the Act is not only the structural and cultural changes it imposed or brought about, it is the appearance of clauses that enshrined in law the configuration of reform, for which there had been no supporting evidence in any of the reviews that had preceded the Act (Prescott's 'Our Fire and Rescue' White Paper, Professor Bain's IRFS, and the two Future of Control Room reports by Mott MacDonald). Despite the fact neither of the government documents advocated regionalisation, Part 1 of the Act (entitled Fire and Rescue Authorities) legislated for the following (emphasis added);

- *“Section 2 Power to create combined fire and rescue authorities*
- *Section 3 Creation of combined fire and rescue authorities: supplementary*

1. *Section 4 Combined authorities under the Fire Service Act 1947*

*These sections give power to create combined fire and rescue authorities, supplementary, and combined authorities. The existing power in the Fire Service Act 1947 to create combined fire authorities is being re-enacted in a modified form to facilitate the establishment of combined fire and rescue authorities for reasons of **economy, efficiency and effectiveness or for areas that correspond to the English regions.**” (Fire Service Act, 2004)*

Such structural elaboration was underpinned by Prescott's regional governance agenda as well as Blair's ideas for 'New Britain' and public services, made clear in his 1997 Leader's Speech when Labour had won the General Election. Those ideas, themselves elaborations of previous public sector management philosophies of the Thatcher administrations, were used both to construct and to legitimate the 2004 Act and were contradictions of Blair's neo-liberalist preference for decentralised Government and previous Conservative ideologies that favoured centralism (Willmott, 2000). New Labour's apparent desire to devolve control from the centre conflicted with ideas to combine local authorities and performance manage them through audit and inspection, from the centre. It was from this confusion that the control room reform project, FiReControl evolved. The reform sought to impose a centralist, single national control room

structure, delivered via the English Government regions. The strapline logo³⁴ for the FiReControl project reinforced this rhetorical concept.



4.21.4 Cultural changes

Cultural elaboration followed the structural changes that resulted from the 2004 Act, which was the outcome of the social interactions between T² and T³. Recalling T¹, there had been little impact on fire service culture following the 1999 Local Government Act. The fire service was steeped in corporatism, where routine behaviours had been reproduced for decades and the situation logic was to protect vested interests. Despite Labour's early attempts to modernise, the Audit Commission in 2000 found that fire authorities were not implementing the Best Value initiative as well as expected. In many cases there was lack of understanding of key performance indicators, and of the process changes required to bring about efficiency (Audit Commission, 2000). In relation to control rooms, the Best Value initiative had become a superficial departmental activity to meet minimum requirements of performance, as opposed to any significant tool for modernisation and inter-organisational collaboration (Audit Commission, 1995, 2000; Mott MacDonald 2000). The Independent Review of the Fire Service (2002), had labelled the fire service as anachronistic, culturally immobile and unrepresentative of the communities it served.

However, five years later the Fire Service Act of 2004 *would* effect cultural change, in the form of the New Labour's style of public management, a fusion of neo liberal and conservative philosophies (c.f. Chapter 2), which would achieve performance improvement through strategic regulation, audit and inspection. The 2004 Fire Service Act removed restrictions that previously prevented Government from intervening in pay disputes. It gave Government substantially increased control over the fire service. Central control was increased by a national framework that placed a number of fire service activities on a statutory footing, such as attending to road traffic accidents, dealing with flooding, responding to terrorist attacks. These were already part of fire service activities but under the Act, they would be measured nationally and fire services would be accountable to Government. Community fire safety was made

³⁴ Department for Communities and Local Government

statutory and the Act would legislate for partnership working, community outreach and diversity. The Act required fire authorities to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan, including targets and objectives for reducing risks, balancing prevention and intervention and determining response standards and resource allocation. These new ways of working, many of which were structural changes would transform the legacy culture that was based around the old duty system, around the fire station, responding to fires when they occurred. It would transform working practices and extend the reach and interactions of the fire service through community engagement and fire prevention activities. This would eventually shift established station-centric, insular cultural behaviours of firefighters who remained together on stations, between fires and often for prolonged periods, where many of the cultural traditions were reinforced (Fitzgerald, 2005).

4.21.5 Agential changes

The morphogenesis of agency (Archer, 1995) resulting in Labour's increased authority and power to act in this arena was the outcome of the socio-cultural interactions between T² and T³. This thesis argues that the differently conditioned agential activity ultimately led to the ODPM legislating for its version of modernisation and from this came the FiReControl project to regionalise 49 control rooms into nine super centres serving John Prescott's regions. This was despite the possibility that there was equally valid evidence from the FBU proposed reforms (Cap Gemini, Ernst and Young, 2002; Pathfinder results, 2002), challenging the ability of a regional policy to achieve the efficiency upon which the IRFS and previous reviews were originally predicated. By the time of the 2004 Act, the imperative for fire service control room reform had changed from economic efficiency 1999/2000, to modernisation in 2003, and then to national security later that year, as the events of 9/11 became part of the rhetoric for reform. What was introduced to (and what was concealed from) the debates about control rooms and major incident management post 9/11, contributed to the Government gaining legitimacy for *its* control room reform ideas over any other alternatives.

Legitimation of the combined authorities, regionalisation ideas and structures through legislation, promoting the expertise of Government consultants, whilst ignoring that of other consultants, evidences a more powerful use of agency, which will be explored in Chapter 6. Reservations for regionalising the fire service had been expressed from all key areas including academics and consultants, as well as the management and unions of the fire service itself as has been illuminated throughout this chapter. A failure to involve the fire service in its own

industry review or to heed advice from critics makes the dichotomy between decentralism and centralism a socio-cultural contradiction which was evident in the FiReControl project aims.

Mott MacDonald had originally recommended smaller control rooms merging with larger ones to ensure success. Bain's IRFS had only recommended co-operation between brigades (and this was his opinion not one of his terms of reference). Bain had not recommended reorganisation as a regional structure. Giving evidence at the ODPM Select Committee, on discussing the Fire Service, the Association of Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers (CACFOA), had also challenged the Government's clarity on regionalisation;

*"The lack of focus and detail around the timing of any future regionalisation, and the weight placed on 'encouraging' voluntary arrangements merely adds to the confusion. It has a particular impact on County Council Fire Authorities who already enjoy the benefit of economies of scale for many of their support activities. It is clear that collaboration across larger areas than the current boundaries of fire authorities is needed to unlock the benefits of modernisation. It is also a question of the capacity and resources to deliver change, and it is apparent that smaller authorities simply do not have the capacity to deliver. The regional issue, thus, merits further scrutiny, and clarity about Government expectations"*³⁵ (HC 1168-II 2002-03, Ev74)

At the same ODPM Select Committee, the FBU expressed;

"The FBU agrees that the Service should share resources when it makes sense to do so. However, pooling resources should not be at the expense of diminishing levels of service, or delivery at the point of need. The proposals to move towards a regional Service need further consideration. The Union is minded to agree that in the event of regional elected assemblies, it would make sense, both in terms of delivery and democracy, for regional fire and rescue authorities to be established. However, as even the states, even in the best-case scenario, the first regional assemblies are not expected to be in place for several years. The Paper also states that local fire authorities will need to establish regional management boards with members from existing fire authorities before 1 April 2004. The preparedness of the Service to respond to such a demand has to be questioned.

The Government should not rush ahead with reform before the proper structures are put in place” (HC 1168-II 2002-03, Ev90).

In a supreme exercise of agency to serve and protect its own interests, despite considerable challenge from various spheres (see above), Labour was not deterred from its direction of travel. That direction was to consolidate Labour’s managerialist aims according to its preference for regional governance configurations with centralist control. This had been foreseen back in 1997 with New Labour modernisation and regionalisation agendas, underpinned by private finance (PFI) methods of funding. In terms of reforming the fire service, Labour was extending those managerialist aims based on Best Value, efficiency and modernisation imperatives to be more accountable and efficient (by Blair’s definitions), and also based on national security and regionalism imperatives, as per their desire to achieve success in reforming this part of the public sector, come what may.

This thesis argues that the decision to regionalise control rooms via the FiReControl project was legitimated by an act of corporate agency and not by a robust evidence-based policy making process.

The development of Labour’s corporate agency, where one group shapes social outcomes to serve or protect its own vested interests will be discussed in Chapter 6 in response to the research question;

- By what emergent powers do the Government reform ideas prevail over alternatives?

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to evaluate the outcomes of the research with respect to the gaps identified in the extant literature on project failure and using the analytic framework of analytic dualism in relation to the search for legitimating mechanisms as defined by the theoretical framework (Chapter 2). This allows the research questions to be answered and the overall study to be positioned in terms of its contribution to knowledge, both of which will be presented in the final Chapter 6.

The findings demonstrate that both institutional and strategic legitimacy were powerfully at work before and between the time periods designated as T¹ and T⁴, when the reform policy was idealised and finally approved for implementation. This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the morphogenetic sequence framework and explains the presence and effects of mechanisms of legitimacy, which were *sui generis* of the situated structures and cultures, and the people involved. The objective of the study was to give new substance to explaining how the emergent properties of mechanisms, such as the institutionally conditioning influences and strategic devices, such as rhetoric, helped to legitimate decisions and specific courses of action. These decisions and courses of action would result in the legitimization of the Government's preferred version of reform.

The discussion begins by highlighting the gaps in the literature and the extant body of knowledge in the field of project failure, as discussed in Chapter 2.

5.1 Gaps in our sources of understanding

The overall aim of the research was to ascertain if alternative theoretical perspectives and evaluation methods can help us to understand more about why many public reform projects do not complete successfully or are considered failures. Chapter 2 identified the limitations of extant sources of understanding failure in public projects. Government evaluations, such as the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), inquiry, take place after the project is cancelled or is labelled a failure. Like much of the project research (Meredith and Mantel, 2011; Scott-Young and Samson, 2008; Merrow, 2011), the Government PAC takes a foundationalist perspective where success and failure are generally considered objective states of reality (McConnell, 2003). The foundationalist perspective tells us that projects fail for reasons to do with budget, time and or scope overruns (Meredith and Mantell, 2011; Merrow, 2011) or because of a failure

to adhere to project management standards (PMI, 2012) or because of future perfect strategizing (Clegg, et al, 2006; Atkin, 2012; Flyvbjerg et al, 2003), that results in over estimated future benefits and underestimated costs. The theory of escalation of commitment (Fox and Staw, 1979), tells us that people continue to commit resources to failing courses of action (such as long term Government reform projects), for reasons that may be social (expectations of others), psychological (internalised views), project (original commitments) or organisational (hierarchical structures and influences), (Staw and Ross, 1987). Controlling for these factors to help reduce their impact on people's tendency to escalate commitment to failing projects demonstrates the emphasis on project agents as the main determinants of failure.

Based on the extant literature, this study challenges three fundamental concepts in the field of public project failure that have become taken-for-granted and as such, this study argues, leave gaps in our understanding;

- 1] That failure is an objective state of reality that is reached,
- 2] Causes of failure can only be found within the boundary of the project itself, and
- 3] That project-related people (agents) are usually to blame.

5.1.1 Gap 1: Failure is an objective state of reality

To address the first gap, an important concept underpinning this study was ontological; what exactly is failure? Extending escalation of commitment research from a positivist to a more social constructionist perspective, Drummond (1996), suggested failure was a loss of support for the myths that are created about a project's possibilities. Myths can and will persist if there is sufficient political will to obscure reality. If the myth becomes taken-for-granted, its possibility is sustained for as long as its legitimacy is maintained (Drummond, 1996).

Therefore, this study premised its perspective of the failure of the FiReControl project as a loss of support, a loss of legitimacy. The study rejected the idea that an objective state of failure was finally reached in 2010 as labelled by the Coalition Government and the PAC inquiry (PAC, 2011).

5.1.2 Gap 2: Causes of failure can only be found within the boundary of the project

The Public Accounts Committee report, ‘The Failure of the FiReControl Project’ was published in 2011. As is usual for the terms of reference of the PAC, the *ex-post* inquiry limited its investigation to the ‘failed project’. No consideration was given to anything beyond the boundaries of the project from its approval date (2004), to its apparent failed state at cancellation (December 2010).

Naming no ministerial names, in criticising ‘the Department’ (the ODPM, later known as DCLG), the PAC report said;

“The Department was keen to launch the FiReControl project. A Gateway Review by the Office of Government Commerce in April 2004 found that the project developed at an “extraordinarily fast pace.” The review concluded that the project was in poor condition overall and at significant risk of failing to deliver” (PAC, 2011, p.7).

Yet, despite this critical comment that significant early risks were evident, due to the *extraordinary fast pace* at which the project developed, we learn nothing of the reasons why or what was happening *before* the project was initiated to influence this hasty approach. The project had been the outcome of an act of parliament that had arisen because of insufficient authority to quell the fire dispute. The ODPM had overtly involved itself in the pay dispute in a way that was unprecedented and the IRFS had been commissioned, which significantly changed the course of events in favour of Government objectives as has been discussed. However, despite such significance, the PAC inquiry had started from the initiation of the FiReControl project and was bounded only by the delivery project.

As a point of departure from the taken-for-granted starting point of ‘day one in the Government project’, this research based its starting point significantly earlier than 2004 when FiReControl was approved. In seeking to address the previous knowledge gap (foundationalist view that failure is an objective state), the research sought to find out when and how legitimacy started for the project since it would be a loss of legitimacy that led to its demise in 2010. To do this the analysis adopted a critical realist overarching philosophy that advocates a retroductive approach in contrast to the positivistic project research, to explore the underlying structures and mechanisms (complex interactions of cultures, structures and agents), which according to

the critical realist paradigm, are not directly accessible to sense experience (Blaikie, 2000). Retroduction is mode of inference in which events are explained by postulating mechanisms which are capable of producing them and it is these mechanisms that developed corporate agency in groups and helped them to build legitimacy for project.

With the critical realist philosophy (choosing the social realist variant), the research used methods of critical hermeneutics and the morphogenetic approach to look beyond and deeper than the event (FiReControl), itself. The methods facilitated analysis of data outside of the project boundaries to explore where and how legitimacy developed for the ideas leading up to 2004, what sustained the development of those ideas and by what power ideas were consolidated into the FiReControl reform project.

5.1.3 Gap 3: Project-related people (agents) are usually to blame.

Unsurprisingly, what we learnt from the PAC report that sought causes of failure of the FiReControl project, was that project delivery agents were to blame. Project directors, procurement and project managers were all found to be weak (PAC, 2011). Using the philosophical approach to search for causal mechanisms not immediately accessible to the senses, embracing the equally influential causal powers of complex interplay of cultures, structures and agents, this study found causal mechanisms that were not just agential.

5.2 Methods that find the little things

To explore the origins of legitimating influences for FiReControl, social realism's morphogenetic approach (Archer, 1995), provided the overarching analytic framework, based on the concept of analytic dualism. Analytic dualism recognises that the entities of social life, the parts (structure and culture) and people, are "analytically separable" (Archer, 1996, p.xvi). The depth analysis of the morphogenetic approach was augmented by concrete analyses using critical hermeneutic methods, which advocate, simply, that the parts can only be understood in relation to the whole and the whole from the inner harmony of its parts (Palmer, 1969, p. 77), and that the parts, once integrated, define the whole. The hermeneutic methods illuminate mechanisms operating at the event level that is the level of reality in critical realism that we 'experience' such as the Government commissions or the management consultant exercises. Overall, the objective of these critical analysis methods was to account not just for the big things that detailed case analysis can reveal, but importantly, also for the little things.

As a phronetic study, the research aim was to ask the ‘little questions’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.133), to have patience and seriousness in the smallest things and to not overlook the minutiae. For example, the study illuminated the relevance of the nick names given to John Prescott and the effects they had on his credibility and ultimately his agency. It showed how Labour’s behind the scenes shuffling of MPs to present Ian McCartney and Andy Ingram, as pro-unionist MPs dealing with the dispute when Prescott was moved side-wards for a short while in November 2002, was a one off strategic act. Neither McCartney nor Ingram appeared to be involved or consulted again after the move failed to win over the FBU. Critical hermeneutic analyses revealed subtle changes to narrative between Government reports that introduced new imperatives for change, but which had huge impact on recommendations. Attention to the timing of the announcement of the IRFS indicated that it must have been discussed at length prior to the Government offering it to the employers as a way of ‘helping’ them to understand the pay settlement since the relatively esteemed panel were ready to begin the review almost immediately. This phronetic approach of attending to the little things advocates the idea that “all the problems of politics, of social organisation, and of education have been falsified through and through....because one learned to despise the ‘little’ things, which means the basic concerns of life itself” (Nietzsche, 1969, p.256, quoted from Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.133)

The aim of these critical research methods was to illuminate more elements of a reform project than traditional post evaluation methods and in so doing to search for and reveal mechanisms that could be influencing the policy ideation stages of such projects. Eisner, (1991) describes being critical as an “art of saying useful things about complex and subtle objects and events so that others ... can see and understand what they did not see and understand before” (p.3). Exposing and exploring failure from a different place and from a new perspective prompted the theoretical framework of legitimacy, both institutional and strategic. The analytic framework was used to separate out structures, cultures and agency, to explore their interactions and outputs over a given time cycle. The objective was to explain how situated actions were both conditioned by, and through complex interactions, influential of, the process of acquiring or strategically deploying legitimacy, to achieve political ends.

5.3 Revealing legitimacy through the morphogenetic approach

In respect to the restructuring of the fire service, legislated by the 2004 Fire Service Act, the morphogenetic approach allowed historically situated social and cultural structures operating

upon and within the fire sector and the Government, to be distinguished. The model enabled the mediating responses of agents to structural influences to be explored in response to internal change (Local Government Act, 1999, Best Value, Chief Fire Officer appointments, etc.), and external structural pressures (industrial action, media coverage, terrorist attacks of 9/11). The morphogenetic approach enabled an exploration of the emergent properties resulting from the mechanisms that were at play when complex interactions occurred between the situated structures, cultures and agents. These mechanisms are now discussed in relation to conceptual framework of legitimacy.

5.3.1 Conditioning influences at T¹

5.3.1.1 Structural institutionalism

Represented at T¹, was the institutional legitimacy of the long-established practices of the fire service, with the dominant, managerial patronage of the FBU that had protected its vested interests and those of key stakeholders, such as the fire service management and the local fire authority employers, and had perpetuated corporatist ways. In the pursuit of legitimacy, the fire service, like other public sector organisations, was embedded in the social interactions of the time, where unions held significant power and important social and material resources were exchanged. This had resulted in individual fire brigades becoming increasingly isomorphic due to mimetic, coercive and normative pressures, (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). The embedded institutional logics had reproduced themselves for many years had successfully protected the status quo and essentially legitimated continued inertia. At T¹, fire service corporatist structures had survived beyond those of other, previously corporatist organisations, such as health, education and transport that had structurally transformed through successive Conservative Governments of the 1980s and early 1990s (c.f. Chapter 2).

It was this structural institutionalism in the fire service that the New Labour executive faced in 1997. However, though the Labour Party was new and visibly different to previous British Governments, they too were institutionally conditioned. Once in power, as will be argued in this chapter, new Governments pick up where old Governments have left off and the business of public sector reform continues. As was explored during the T² to T³ stage, isolated manifestations of discontent had begun in various independent fire brigades. Hitherto, the fire service in general had been below the major reform radar of previous Governments but through increasingly visible industrial disputes, the fire service was presenting resistance to Blair's new political agenda for modernising Britain. Towards the aspirations of New Labour, the

attractiveness of a reform idea would contrast with the problems of the current reality in an age-old institution such as the fire service and given the nature of politics, the findings support the idea that the 'new' politicians idealised new solutions (Brunsson, 1989; Jennings, 2012), and FiReControl was one of those solutions.

However, given the evidence of failure in IT reforms of public services around the time of T¹ (for example, Child Support Agency, Magistrates Courts System, National Air Traffic System, c.f. Chapter 2), the early warning signs of potential failure for the fire service regionalisation reform in particular (as mentioned in both the Mott MacDonald report (2000) and the Bain report (2003), why was the reform solution still sought so enthusiastically? Perhaps reforms are facilitated by organizational forgetfulness, which "prevents the past from disturbing the future" (Brunsson, 1993, p. 41). This notion would lead to a constant supply of ideas to solve those never-ending organisational problems and because of this, the process of reform becomes legitimated as institutionalized routine work of Governments. The New Labour Government continued along this path with its modernisation agenda to reform public services through rationalisation and technology based on a set of ideas that were not arrived at democratically but were reinforced through legitimacy.

Despite attempts to reform the fire service during the early years of the new Labour Government through Best Value programmes, for example, little had penetrated into the pre-existing structures and cultures. Organisational change was superficial; surface level tensions developed within the fire organisations between the need for legitimacy and the need for efficiency (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Collecting and submitting Best Value indicator data to central Government from an isolated statistics department, while at the same time solving their local problems of efficiency more individually across other departments (Audit Commission, 2000), fire brigades effectively began to decouple their structures, (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), in order to appear legitimate and compliant to external auditors. This was achieved by maintaining a façade, which reflected the prevailing rationalized myths of a modernised organisation using Best Value procedures. However, it was found that inside fire brigade structures, the actual state of the organisation tended to be different and more oriented towards the day-to-day tasks at hand (Audit Commission, 2000), which reflected that in reality there was little change to operations. Best Value was not effective at disrupting the deeper structures and cultures of the fire service. This evidences the effects of institutional legitimacy, not just

in the old ways of the fire service, but also in the political system itself, regardless of the new party.

The idea that organisations competing for power choose to exploit the legitimating effect of isomorphism was observed in several ways. The style and public imagery of New Labour ‘the brand’, competing for power at the 1997 General Election was explored at T¹. From the morphogenetic perspective, all structural influences as emergent powers of culture and structures are “mediated to people by shaping the situations in which they find themselves” (Archer, 1995, p.196). So, whilst the circumstances confronted by the new Government were not of their making, particularly after 18 years under a distinctly different Government administration, they did affect what the contemporary politicians made of them and how they reconstituted themselves in the process.

5.3.1.2 New Public Management

Taking the first point, the public management policies were not of New Labour’s making. Rather they were an inherited set of bespoke structures, politically and (after almost two decades), culturally shaped by Margaret Thatcher’s conservative and neo-liberal politics, which had also risen to dominance in the US under President Ronald Reagan. As was discussed in Chapter 2, the effect of the US Democrats’ party landslide electoral losses to Republican Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, inspired a group of prominent Democrats (such as Bill Clinton), to make radical shifts to their policies and the ‘New Democrats’ were conceived. Their new political approach became known as the "Third Way" and by the mid-1990s the new democratic movement that was developing through the US, Australia and Germany and was giving rise to new political imagery and public management philosophies. Through mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991), NPM policies were spreading throughout the western world. Tony Blair was advocating these same principles for Britain in his ‘New’ politics portfolio, as he promoted the ‘cool Britannia’ cultural movement of the 1990s (Turner, 2013). The modern, new democratic, media-managed style and manner in which Blair led Labour into power in 1997, hitherto anathema in British politics, mirrored the US Democrat’s

US Presidential Election win the previous year, including chart-topping theme tunes along the campaign trail³⁶.

The contextual situations into which the Blair Government arrived, such as the public management philosophies of conservatism as well as those of the new democratic movement provided conditioning influences on the complex interactions that would follow. Advocating Archer's (1995; 2003), theory of human agency, the structures and cultures into which the new Government arrived influenced but did not determine behaviours of the leadership as in Bourdieu's (2005) concept of 'habitus'³⁷. Habitus stresses the role of social conditioning in determining our behaviour and downplays the contribution of a person's conscious deliberation. Archer's (1995; 2003) theory on human agency places greater stress on conscious, reflexive deliberation and the consequent choices that individuals make. The research shows that on winning the 1997 general election and entering into prior constructed new public management traditions that were laid down through earlier morphogenetic cycles in Britain and abroad, Blair was both influenced by that which he confronted and thereafter, was reflexively and intentionally influential to it, over the course of his administrations.

The economist Friedrich Hayek³⁸ had influenced Margaret Thatcher. The sociologist, Anthony Giddens³⁹ provided the inspiration for Tony Blair's politics. Initially conditioned by them, the agency of Blair's administration shifted the institutional logics of Thatcher's neo-liberalist NPM philosophy towards new democratic politics, yet the changes in public management as outlined by the Local Government Act continued along more or less the same lines of

³⁶ In 1994 "Things can only get better" by D-Ream was used as the theme tune to Labour's 1997 election campaign.

³⁷Habitus is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these (Bourdieu 1984). In this sense habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously, 'without any deliberate pursuit of coherence... without any conscious concentration' (ibid, p.170).

³⁸ Friedrich von Hayek, the economist inspired the central values of Margaret Thatcher's neo-liberal politics based the notion of markets and competition between nations, regions, firms and between individuals.

³⁹ Anthony Giddens' Third Way political philosophy promoted an ethical doctrine that views social democratic Governments as having achieved a viable ethical socialism by removing the unjust elements of capitalism by providing social welfare and other policies.

managerialism. Building on from the notion of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991), it is the replication of rhetoric, forms and practices across the world, in what Pollitt (2001), called convergence that “may have more to do with Government fashions, symbolism and the propagation of norms than with the grim dictates of the global economy or the functional necessity for increased efficiency” (Pollitt, 2001, p.934). On the strength of continuous reproduction throughout the world, through forces of isomorphism, NPM has gained legitimacy. Blair as an executive politician was conditioned by what he confronted once in power and set about to reform public services. Though NPM as a framework of management policies has itself been elaborated through morphogenetic cycles, as new actors and cultural shifts have emerged, the structures and cultures of NPM continue to dominate Government philosophies for managing public services (Dunleavy, 2006).

At T¹ in the research, Labour had not long been in power and NPM-like reforms had not yet reached the fire service but as this research suggests, public services are in a constant state of reform, via Government-crafted NPM solutions for never-ending organisational problems. In this study, the problems began as pay dispute and ended as national security problems. Though there are new generations of politicians, NPM reform solutions continue to be the cyclical focus of Governments in the continual quest for the elusive thing called efficiency. This study argues that new morphogenetic cycles are starting and finishing all the time effecting elaboration or stasis (Archer, 1995), of public services depending on agential effects of conditioned politicians to greater or lesser degrees. The T¹ of these cycles and the conditioning influences agents find themselves facing will inevitably vary depending on the social interactions of previous cycles. In the next section the emergent properties of powerful mechanisms resulting from the social interactions that followed the T¹ chosen for this study, are discussed.

5.3.2 Social interactions at T² to T³

5.3.2.1 Strategic legitimacy

A limitation of a structural institutional approach is that it fails to acknowledge the phenomenological or conscious reflexive perspective, with language and meanings reflecting only social structure (Green and Li, 2011). Archer (1996), considers this as committing the epistemic fallacy of conflating structures with agency and in so doing obscuring the connection of social action to meaning, as if structures alone constrained or enabled social action. As critical realists would assert and as the findings demonstrated, actors are not dopes of structures or cultures (Garfinkel, 1967).

Institutional sources of legitimacy alone, such as NPM, fail to explain adequately the process of institutional change. In morphogenetic terms, and advocating analytic dualism (Archer, 1996), we need to reintroduce the people to the equation. The study explored the effects upon people of the contradictions and complementarities in the cultural system, into which social agents (the Blair executive) arrived with ideas. They were conditioned by the situations they found themselves in to varying degrees and subsequently, by how they held on to those ideas. As discussed, the findings suggested that at T¹, upon the arrival of New Labour in power, agents in the fire organisations did not abandon their long standing beliefs and ideas, and neither, upon exposure to fire service institutions, did the new democratic executive of the Labour Party.

Despite making little impact on structures and cultures of the fire service at the start of Labour's first administration (1997 to 2001) through Best Value, New Labour continued to promote strongly their ideas of modernisation, based on new democratic ideologies that had and were taking shape around the Western world. Holding on to ideas may be partly explained by institutionalism, insofar as actors deploying language strategically or engaging in rhetoric to produce myths or claims to knowledge. This may be achieved by "providing convincing accounts, regulating impressions and images" (Alvesson, 1993, p.1011). In so doing the members of these organisations construct perceptions of quality, value, expertise, reputation and share these myths within and across organisational boundaries, (ibid). It is the strategic deployment of language, embodied in rhetoric (Alvesson, 1993), and the concept of agency, which is now introduced to the discussion.

5.3.2.2 Shifting institutional logics with rhetoric

Institutions are socially constructed through discourse, embodying sets of sanctions that make certain viewpoints dominant and thus make contradictory actions problematic (Alvesson, 1993). Institutional logics are systems of socially constructed cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values, and beliefs, by which organizations provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and space, and reproduce experience (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). Therefore, discourse affects action (Fairclough, 2005). New Labour's discourse on modernising Britain was the socially constructed rhetoric of Blair (ibid, 2000; 2005), and his new democratic-minded followers. Although it is interesting to note that the new institutional myths of New Labour had not fully propagated nor replaced entirely those of old Labour; far from it. There were many traditional Labour party members who did not share Blair's ideas for modernising the fire service. However, through other structures and mechanisms that promoted party loyalty by treating conflicting views or actions as problems, those old Labour ideas were rarely voiced publicly (McAnulla, 2007).

The FBU institution, as another socially constructed set of beliefs embodied its sanctions too; all management decisions went through the Union first (Seifert, 2011). The fire service managers and the local authority employers were the less dominant elements of the tripartite arrangement that the union essentially controlled (Seifert, 2011; Redman, 2006). Anything alternative to this was not accepted as was the case when the Chief Fire Officer at Merseyside Fire Service attempted to change recruitment traditions as discussed in Chapter 6. The social interactions between T² and T³ demonstrated that as the disputes began, the situational logics between the Government and the fire service, which contradicted and competed against each other, sought to deny the legitimacy of either group's discourse. However ultimately, the situational logics of one group would shift, as is the tendency for organisational change and progression (Archer, 1995). Using Alvesson's (1993) theories of rhetorical agency and rhetorical institutionalism, we can begin to understand Archer's (1996) morphogenetic cycles in terms of the roles and effects of the parts and the people as they interact.

This study attests that the shift in institutional logics that finally resulted in structural elaboration at T⁴, was brought about through the complex social interactions, the detail for which was played out in the previous chapter. How the decisions and actions of one group over-powered those of the other, the FBU, were not unusual; they were the tools of politics, employed not just by politicians but also by the FBU in the battle to legitimate a course of

action and ensure the survival of the respective organisations as legitimate entities. Both of the key groups of agents (the FBU and New Labour) used such devices but ultimately New Labour used them to greater effect. Thus, shifts in the institutional logics were facilitated by strategic use of rhetoric, not by happenstance but because those holding the reins of power must deploy rhetoric (Krebs and Jackson, p.27) to harness resources for political gain. Rhetoric in this sense includes all speech acts whether they are oral or written. Strategic rhetorical manoeuvre can prove critical to success in political contests even when one's opponents have not internalized the promoted values (ibid). Organisations are "systems of persuasion" where organisational actors are agents or rhetors that deploy language strategically (Alvesson, 1993, p.1101)

Political rhetoric can give salience to a situation, translating its exigencies into some provocative language and symbolism (Vatz, 1973), and creating myths (Drummond, 1996). For Alvesson (1993), it is the ambiguity that is inherent in social life, the complexity in which we find ourselves that forces actors to use rhetoric to construct the institutional myths in order to provide meaning and legitimacy to organisational practices and beliefs. For New Labour, political beliefs were laid down previously through NPM principles, embedded within the structures and cultures of Governments that had gone before and through isomorphic convergence throughout new democratic parties around the world. For example, there is no 'reality' in the claims that many of the UK's public sector projects are in our national interest; they are rhetorically constructed myths. FiReControl was idealised as a critical, national project that would make communities safer, fire services more efficient and later on, it was said it would improve our national security in the face of terrorism. The Government claims that the High Speed 2 (HS2) project will bring prosperity to the North and redress the concept of London-centricity (where most of the country's wealth is created and maintained around London and the South East). Many of the failed NHS IT reform projects were promoted using myths about 'delivering patient choice'. Whilst all of these reforms each have their project-specific rhetoric, all are predicated on socially constructed myths about increasing efficiency, whether through joined up working, faster systems or reduced waiting times. There is no proven evidence that such deliverables (patient choice, national security, efficiency or prosperity for the North), can be achieved but ideologically actors as "agentic meaning-makers" (Green and Li, 2011, p.1664) use such talk to tell stories that will secure resources, and thus begins the legitimisation of large-scale reform projects. Political beliefs, perceptions and expectations are overwhelmingly not based on observation or empirical evidence available to participants but rather "upon cuings amongst groups of people who jointly create the

meanings they will read into current and anticipated events” (Vatz, 1973, p.159).

In the case of this study, the talk was the action (Pollitt, 2001) and the winning talk, based on the questionable evidence of Bain and Mott MacDonald, was rhetorically more powerful. This powerful rhetoric gave salience to Labour’s myth of modernisation instead of any alternative viewpoints. The analysis provides evidence that pre-existing institutional logics of NPM and ‘what it is to’ be the Government in power, exerted conditioning influences on Labour actors during the late 1990s and this became manifest in their rhetoric, once in power. Concomitantly, the emergent powers of that rhetorical agency served to legitimate ideas and courses of action in a continuous morphogenetic cycle of elaborating and bringing ideas to bear.

The interplay of rhetoric from both Labour and the FBU provides power in explaining some of the outcomes of this case as per the unit of analysis. Following social realist ontology, rhetoric is not epiphenomenal, without causal influence (Green and Li, 2011). Nor, in this case, as constructivists would argue, was it simply a matter of political actors being rhetorically effective in successfully persuading the FBU of the correctness of their preferred modernisation configuration. Rather it was a combination of the interplay between pre-existing parts (cultures and structures), influencing the people who in turn influenced the parts in continuous cycles that either maintain or move things on in directions of travel, based on whom possesses the greater power. Possessing greater power to act means possessing corporate agency. Corporate agents promote their own interests to define and redefine organisational goals; they “pack more punch in defining and redefining structural forms” (Archer, 1995, p. 191). How the agency of competing interest groups (New Labour and Union executives) was transformed, will be discussed in detail in Section 6.2.1.

5.3.2.3 Coercion

It took several years before Labour’s ideas for regionalising and modernising the fire service gathered sufficient legitimacy (at T⁴). A series of complex social interactions between T² and T³, resulted in the gradual eroding of the Union dominance, evidenced by the FBU leadership indicating to the employers, they would agree to a reduced pay increase (16% from 40%, before the ODPM halted the process in November 2002). This may be viewed as a loss of legitimacy of the FBU as the dominant group in the tripartite management arrangement that had prospered for so long. Conversely, there is evidence of Labour’s greater skill at deploying rhetorical

devices to increase legitimacy for their ideas. The Labour executive used the privilege of office and made better use of media opportunities, particularly as emotions ran high during the strikes. The FBU were on the receiving end of rhetorical coercion (Krebs and Jackson, 2007). This occurs when the opponents (the FBU), have through contest, been talked into a corner, and compelled to endorse a stance they would otherwise reject. Evidence for successful execution of coercion appears when the ODPM's rhetorical moves deprive the FBU of "materials out of which to craft a reply that falls within the bounds of what the public would accept" (ibid, p.36), such as when the FBU's alternative proposals for modernisation were omitted from the IRFS and any other public debate. Whilst Labour may have deployed arguments in the hope that they could eventually persuade the FBU and the fire service in general (to modernise), their more immediate task was to leave their opponents, including the old Labour back benchers, without access to the rhetorical materials needed to craft a socially sustainable rebuttal to Blair's agenda for New Britain. This would be achieved by skilful framing of messages through what may be considered the parliamentary privileges of public and business communication channels (radio and TV interviews, stage appearances at business conferences) and control of powerful processes such as 'independent reviews' and Government commissions.

5.3.2.4 Strategic manoeuvres legitimating Labour's 'New' vision

The evidence for political actors being conditioned by the existing discourse and structures of previous Governments, for example, in NPM policies, has been discussed; When Labour took office in 1997, after 18 years of the Conservatives, they picked up the familiar gauntlet of public sector reforms and efficiency that was becoming familiar to the expanding army of NPM followers spreading through Western world Governments (c.f. Pollitt, 2001). This study shows how the emergent powers of those political agents, began to exert influence on the structures and cultures. In so doing, the complex interplay between people and elaborated parts created new emergent powers, which in turn conditioned future interactions. How this unfolded is captured in the key texts (The Future of Control Rooms in England and Wales, 2000, 2003; Independent Review of the Fire Service, 2002; Our Fire and Rescue Service White Paper 2003). To the non-critical reader, these document the justification of the reforms in the taken-for-granted manner such processes follow. However, on deeper hermeneutic analysis, adopting Ricoeur's (1978), concept of suspicion, the texts evidence the powerful new concepts and language which had entered the political discourse in the matter of public sector management.

Despite the complexity of the fire service, through these texts we see how Labour (like previous Governments), and its management consultants, adopt the rational/instrumental perspective as an ideal and use highly abstract language in the process. Fundamental detail, especially in the IRFS and the Mott MacDonald report that followed it, were conveniently and rationally ignored. What academic researchers would consider highly limiting in data quality for example, the authors of the reports confidently justify as acceptable. For example, the significant lack of stakeholder involvement in a sector-wide review was deemed acceptable in the IRFS and put down to the national strikes, as if they were coincidental. That the review was commissioned in the very midst of the dispute, on the brink of strike action, was the detail that was rationally excused as unimportant. Similarly, in the 2003 Mott MacDonald update review of emergency control rooms, justifying the use of call centre cost modelling and statistics that were five years out of date, on the grounds of providing consistency between reports is bewildering. The apparent point of the reports was to support the notion that reforms would make operational efficiency savings in the future and the fire service was operating in a changed environment. Yet the operational data was five years out of date but that detail did not provoke concern in the authors, nor the Government commissioners. It is these examples, which support the suggestion that reforms become taken-for-granted ideas, where the detail is less critical, as opposed to evidence-based practices (Brunsson, 1993). The study suggests that the fire service reforms were not (or perhaps not just) about the increasing the role and power of managers in the fire service or the adoption of private sector management discourses and techniques to improve operating efficiency and manage performance. The changes may have represented a deeper ideological process that would transform power relationships, culture, control and accountability (Clarke et al. 1994) in the quest for legitimating the new democratic politics of New Labour.

The report of the IRFS, recommended the introduction of wide scale new public management policies of performance measurement and accountability. The report suggested changes should be made in relation to working practices and that the service should be reorganised to be more in line with other public sector organisations, including wide-scale changes to:

- i. financial structures
- ii. Lines of accountability
- iii. Involvement of private sector (Bain, 2002, p.76)

The rhetoric of managerialism and the language of Blair's agenda for modernisation were prominent throughout. The political language that emerged was one which drew on a new democratic discourse, representing a shift from Conservative Party language of 'competition', which had been the emphasis in previous reforms, for example in the NHS. The use of political discourse in the IRFS was interesting because the main author was a senior academic. Once published in text, and labelled by the Government as 'Independent', the Labour executive were able to use it to back up their arguments, as if, despite its major research limitations, the IRFS was the objective truth on how to reform the fire service. Ironically, it was only considered an objective and independent review by the people who commissioned, scoped and funded it. Elsewhere it was challenged (c.f. Seifert, 2002; Birchall, 2004). Nevertheless, with the privilege of Government channels to promote ideas, the IRFS took on a life of its own and its rhetoric gave salience to its own existence as the Labour executive reinforced its apparent independence and authority, despite its significant shortcomings in both departments.

Thus the very process of commissioning the IRFS was a rhetorical move on the part of the Government. The Labour executive took every public opportunity to appear at high profile events, whilst the opposing FBU members were viewed via television scenes of angry strikers, freezing outside closed fire stations with burning braziers. Labour politicians exploited the ministerial privilege to use public arenas, including senior business leaders conferences (Chancellor Gordon Brown at the CBI, 2002), to promote their ideas. Labour used the IRFS as their justification, whilst castigating, or worse, concealing any alternative views. The FBU did not have such privileged access to the same channels beyond traditional media coverage. Unlike the staged-managed appearances of the Labour executives, projecting professional modernisation imagery, the media coverage of the FBU generally showed them as old style, confrontational, unrefined packs of working class men not wanting to accept change, unwilling to be part of Blair's polished, modern new vision for the public sector.

As time progressed through T^2 to T^3 , the Labour executive gained greater strength through clever moves and turns as outline in Chapter 6, the FBU began to acquiesce to some of Labour's organisational change demands despite not having been persuaded by the benefits (accepting a series of reduced pay level increases). The FBU was now facing a crisis of its own legitimacy and the alternatives were to lose even more powers as a union (Prescott's threat to change the law to give him greater powers, if pay dispute not settled), or continue to push, to harness the resistance of the members for longer. Though only indicative of public opinion, support for

the firefighters appeared to be in decline as BBC polls showed the public's change in attitude towards the striking fire fighters. The following vote result was published on the BBC website (BBC News Wednesday, 13 November, 2002), that featured an on-going update for the fire dispute between 2002 and 2003;

Do you back the firefighters' strike?

Yes

4.07%

No

95.93%

64332 Votes Cast

Results are indicative and may not reflect public opinion

This would suggest that the public being swayed by the Government's more powerful rhetoric, whilst the FBU was slowly conceding to it, as pay deals talked first of 40% then of 16%, and then a three-year staggered 11% (Bain, 2002). The FBU members were frustrated with their own executive and it would be this that would contribute further to the FBU's loss of strength in the battle. As 2003 started, this shift might indicate that the actual motives or the sincerity of the FBU or the Labour executive were not particularly relevant at this stage. What was happening as the situation logics moved beyond *competition* and headed towards *compromise* was less to do with convivial acceptance of Government's ideas and more to do with the FBU cutting its losses, as ODPM ultimatums and power changes took place. In the battle between the power groups possessing agency (which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter), a stronger party had emerged and it was the greater agency with which Labour used strategic legitimacy, including rhetoric with coercive characteristics that resulted in their more successful exercise of power.

Critical hermeneutics of the key texts revealed the rhetoric of the Blair ideology that underpinned the recommendations. The methods helped to expose some of the taken-for-granted assumptions of such Government exercises when valid and reliable evidence is scant. It demonstrates how the research process can be exploited when commissioners are in positions of power. More importantly in terms of understanding reform policy, the hermeneutic inquiry revealed that while the philosophy of New Labour showed some key differences with those of conservatism (discourse of joined up collaboration as opposed to competition), their agenda to disregard democratic consensus and promote an anti-collectivist set of values continued in the

same vein. This is important to the question which will be answered later in respect of ‘what can be done’ and who is best placed to decide the best course of action for multibillion pound reform projects in the public sector?

Through critical hermeneutic analyses, the four main Government texts, which sought to evidence the Government’s decision-making process, emphasised the fact that social reality is historically constituted. The findings indicate how cultural messages concealed and revealed, how the ambiguity of meaning allowed a ‘group to represent itself while opening the door for distortion and domination’, (Roberge, 2011, p.5). Political or ideological exaggerations, fallacies, taken-for-granted flawed processes and contradictions were brought to the surface to reveal the values, norms and beliefs of the Blair executive. Through a process of legitimisation that proved more successful for the Government than other groups with ideas, (namely the FBU), it thus became more powerful to act.

The critical hermeneutic process demonstrated how “action can be best understood as opposing performances driven by ideological-moral views. As a method for understanding, its success depends on its ability to articulate a theory of meaning with one of action and experience as well as its capacity to renew our understanding of the problem of ideology” (Roberge, 2011, p.5). Analysis of the texts highlighted New Labour’s lack of sector-wide democratic negotiation and consultation in the development of its far-reaching reform policies, whilst giving the appearance of acting on the evidence of independent commissions. The taken-for-granted authorial and professional legitimacy and positivist research approaches, informed decision-making and enabled action in favour of Government objectives. Despite not being fully evidence-based, the IRFS, and the all-important 2003 White Paper (Our Fire and Rescue Service) that followed it, conveyed the generalised perception that the Government’s actions were desirable, proper and appropriate “within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p.574). At the same time the narrative contextualised different perspectives so as to illuminate underlying issues and conflicts between, for example the transition from state to market-oriented policies and shifting paradigms of long-standing Labour-unions relations.

5.3.2.5 The power of the Commission

The decision to commission the IRFS had been the turning point in this story. In and of itself, a Government’s choice to commission a review indicates both a willingness to commit

additional resources to a problem and a readiness to cede a certain level of control over the outcome (Hunter and Boswell, 2014). Was the IRFS commissioned to contribute knowledge to inform Labour's reform policy, as is the case for some industry reviews (Rowe and McAllister, 2006)? If it was, the considerable number of limiting factors affecting the review would clearly have an impact on the quality of knowledge it would produce. Hunter and Boswell (2014), argue that the value of commissions may lie as much in their symbolic functions, either to signal a Government is taking appropriate action or to substantiate a course of action with evidence, or to solve a problem. The IRFS commission may have been set up to signal that the Government was taking the pay dispute seriously and was looking to help solve a problem. However, in practice, the purpose may have been to redefine the problem. Given the factors governing the review, it was unlikely to produce recommendations that would cause the Government to adjust its policies on modernisation. In fact the IRFS served both to legitimate the Government's course of action to modernise the fire service as per Blair's agenda and to buy time to try to delay the national strikes that the FBU had promised. Blair, as an institutional entrepreneur (Mutch, 2007), operating as a change agent acting upon his own interests (DiMaggio and Powell, 1988; Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006), deployed his social skills as a method of agency to motivate cooperation in other actors and thus change or reproduce institutional orders (Fligstein, 1997). The ability of the Labour executive to succeed in motivating the rational men of the IRFS team to cooperate with what may be termed 'Blairist' modernisation concepts and to conclude them as the best solution after a very short industry-wide review that undemocratically excluded key view-points, demonstrates not just Blair's institutional entrepreneurship qualities but also the greater agency he effects for his executive leadership team and beyond it.

Using Hunter and Boswell's (2014), indicators to establish the true function of a Government commission (that is, the commission's composition, resources and time-frame, independence, dissemination and Government take-up), with regards to the IRFS, we can see that the fundamental reason for which it can only be considered to have been commissioned, was to provide legitimacy to Blair's agenda for modernisation. Assessment against the indicators indicates the IRFS was not commissioned to provide evidence to solve a problem or substantiate the policy, despite the claims it was. The composition of the review team signalled its authority more than any problem-solving or substantiating function; the Chair, Professor Bain, was not only a distinguished academic, he was well known to the Labour party and its policy makers, having chaired the Low Pay Commission, (1997 to 2002), and presided over

the Manitoba New Democratic Party in mid-60s Canada. His authority in the field lent weight to the process and much was made of his professional stature. If the IRFS was really intended to solve a problem or to provide evidence for modernisation, the lack of involvement of the fire service profession and its unions, a reliance on legacy reports with legacy data and the exceptionally short timescales would not serve these purposes. As per the dissemination indicator in Hunter and Boswell's (2014), categorising the function of commissions, the high profile launch and media coverage of the review signalled the Government's greater interest in publicising its existence, composition and workings of the review, as a means of signalling its credibility. The IRFS was less to do with adjusting policy as a result of any detailed evidential findings.

5.3.2.6 Hiring 'experts'

It is widely recognized that management consultants have been important players in the reforms of a number of countries, including the UK, the USA, New Zealand (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006). Management consultants provide the ideas for which ministers and senior civil servants have such a strong appetite and they have also provided employment for a number of ex-senior civil servants, "who can contribute their 'local knowledge' and networks of contacts inside the Government machine" (Pollitt, 2001, p.942). In Chapter 2, the role of management consultants was discussed in relation to explaining how mimetic isomorphism occurs as a result of the small pool of firms used by governments. This small pool of ideas results in a few organisation models being used repeatedly and spreading throughout industries (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). Moreover, as a result of re-using management consultants, the language of governments becomes the language of consultants, resulting in risk-averse governments re-hiring those same consultants because they speak the language of governments!

Labour hired management consultants, Mott MacDonald, first in 2000 then later in 2003 in relation to reform configurations in control rooms. Mott MacDonald were also the chosen management consultant for other DCLG fire-related reforms such as the Firelink national communications project which was delivered in parallel with FiReControl. Hiring and re-hiring tried and tested suppliers like this demonstrates the government's superior effectiveness (compared to FBU's hiring of equally expert management consultants, Cap Gemini), in building legitimacy for its actions by using its network of familiar agents to advocate their powerful rhetoric.

Management consultants have been identified as “key levers in the process of changing management practices in the public sector” (Hood, 1995), having significant influence within the transformation of the public sector (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). Yet there is little evidence to indicate they offer value for money or even accurate expertise. Taking the NHS as an example of where the public sector regularly engages consultants, in 2014 the cost rose to £640m per year, more than double the amount recorded in 2010 (Oliver, 2014). NHS research organisation, The King’s Fund asserts that the effects of management consultants’ work are inconclusive and they remain unaccountable and can walk away from bad or damaging advice (ibid). Reacting to this level of spending and accountability, the Health Select Committee in 2014 promised to tackle the issue and clamp down on such activity (Una O’Brian, 2014). Yet still today in March 2016, the Nursing Times reported a continued increase in NHS spending on management consultants, now standing at £600m per year.

Despite this considerable public sector spending, claims to expertise are sometimes more consequential than the knowledge itself and “being perceived as an expert is more crucial to being one” (Alvesson, 1993). Hiring consultants from knowledge-intensive firms, such as Mott MacDonald, not only serves to legitimate a course of action, helping agents to change the distribution of power within an organisation, it also reinforces claims over knowledge production, perpetuated in cycles of using same consultants to speak the same language to ensure results. This further evidences the more effective use of strategic legitimacy by the Government compared to the FBU in the quest to promote and implement Labour’s modernisation over any alternative solutions.

5.3.2.7 The trump card: legislation

The final strategic manoeuvre in the challenge to reform the fire service based on Blair’s modernisation agenda was the Fire Service Act, 2004. The strategic use of legitimating devices between T^2 and T^3 , such as political rhetoric (itself conditioned by institutionally legitimated beliefs of NPM), and through the process of commissioning reviews and management consultancies, the Government was ultimately able to use its position of power, with ease when harnessing the full legitimating might of the political process. Just five months after the publication of the IRFS, the ODPM published the follow-up White Paper, which begins the process that sets into motion the exclusive privilege of a Government’s authority; an act of parliament. In social realist terms, this may be seen as the ultimate exercise in corporate agency. Its power confers legitimacy to the actions of the Government regardless of their credibility. Based on the Government texts analysed in this research, the political processes to

legislate for a raft of reforms progressed, despite a lack of credibility on many counts. Following a draft Fire Service Bill, the Fire Services Act came into effect on 1st October, 2004. Responding to the Act, the ODPM Select Committee reported on the Fire and Rescue Service in January 2004. Even at that committee, the members cast doubt on some of the policies, particularly on the idea of regionalisation that had appeared in the White Paper (that was about to become legislation), despite no evidence trail. The Select Committee report found that the main grounds for the reform seemed to be cost, not operational effectiveness or national security. The Committee reported that the Government had not made clear how the reforms would improve public safety or reduce bureaucratic overheads. It also cast doubt on whether the regionalisation should be imposed on local FSA. Many witnesses to the inquiry complained of a lack of clarity and openness in the Government's plans (ODPM Committee, 2004, HC 43 2003-04). Nevertheless the Act was passed.

Legislation serves to embody new institutional constraints, rules and norms so as to set new limits in a particular sphere. There is a view that legislation along with other Government action is a product "supplied to well-organized interest groups that are struggling to maximize the incomes of their members, often at the expense of the less well-organized" (Shaviro, 1990, p.6). This study demonstrates how the Labour Party, once struggling to get its modernisation agenda accepted and embedded in the fire service became able, through a more successful series of legitimating actions at the expense of the less well-organised FBU, to use the legislative process to further its objectives.

In the build-up to the 2004 Fire Service Act that would legislate for radical changes, dissatisfaction had grown from a tired public, an unsettled and weary fire service and a frustrated Government, in response to the bitter and unresolved dispute being played out between key protagonists of the ODPM and the FBU. The research shows how ideas embodying the political benefits of responding to pay dispute malaise by reforming the fire service, gradually gained legitimacy. The study illuminates that legitimacy for Blair's reforms was gained not through an evidence base but through effective political manoeuvres.

Legislation can have political goals (Shaviro, 1990). Discussing the legislative process in US Congress, for example, Shaviro (1990), describes the political goals as i) enhancing re-election chances, ii) prestige, and iii) ideology. In this study, maintaining good will amongst the electorate to ensure re-election required effective use of the media to portray Blair's reform

ideas. Initially public opinion fell more towards supporting the fire-fighters as was evidenced by the general support of other unions and opinion polls in late 2002. In legitimating their own ideas, New Labour took every opportunity to fuel public fears around prolonged strike action, highlighting the threat of terrorism and the need to send army troops to war not to domestic fires in Green Goddesses. The legitimacy-building goal of enhancing prestige for the New Labour 'group' speaks for itself. Although New Labour may not have succeeded against the FBU without stage-managing communications to the public or to the media, even without their support, Labour as the Government were never powerless to advance their objectives. Governments can both adapt and introduce the legislation to meet requirements and use promises and threats relating to future behaviours to win broader support (Shaviro, 1990).

In this case, the timing was important which is why the temporality of the morphogenetic sequence captures the flow of events that built legitimacy and led to the legislative outcome being accepted with little challenge. Had that same legislation been considered necessary back at T¹, when the take-up of Best Value across the fire service was minimal (Audit Commission, 2000), the ease with which structural reform became enshrined in law would have been far less assured.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND CONTRIBUTIONS

6.0 Concluding

The aim of the study was to use alternative methods and theoretical approaches to gain a more complex understanding of the factors influencing the ‘failure’ of reform projects than those revealed by the government evaluations from which we learn lessons. The empirical case of FiReControl was used to illustrate the methods in order to answer four research questions that would provide the greater understanding sought by the study.

1. How do cultural, structural and agential mechanisms enable and constrain the legitimization of public reforms?
2. By what emergent powers do Government reform ideas prevail over alternatives?
3. How can causal mechanisms of legitimacy influence the scope of reforms?
4. How do government evaluations account for such antecedent influences in delivering lessons learned after implementation failure?

The study concludes with contributions that can be made to the fields of reform projects, their management and evaluation and answers a fifth question to fulfil the phronetic aspirations of the study and to make a contribution to practice.

5. What can be done to make a difference

Chapter 1 introduced the research problem. Chapter 2 presented the literature review highlighting the flat ontology of extant perspectives and methods used in areas of inquiry that view project failure as an objective state that exists and is caused only by people. A link was made between the alternative concept of failure being a loss of legitimacy, and theories of institutional and strategic legitimacy. To address the ontological issue that failure is not an objective ‘truth’, the analytic framework of a stratified reality and analytic dualism was introduced. From the literature gaps, legitimacy theories and analytic concepts, five guiding research questions were posed. Chapter 3 discussed the methodology and described the methods used in the study to meet the research objectives. Two frameworks of understanding were used to understand more about the failure of the FiReControl reform project. The first framework used critical hermeneutics to understand the build-up to the project as it was documented in reports commissioned by Government. The method gave an historical account of the period and revealed the changing discourse on imperatives for reform as dictated by the

Government, as different contexts developed over the time period. The method revealed underlying NPM ideology, as well as a range of political imperatives such as efficiency, modernisation and national security, that helped to legitimate Labour's domination of the reform agenda. The hermeneutic analysis revealed how those with privilege (the Government and its ministries), have greater access to resources (management consultants, Government commissions, media), that allow them to promote ideologies and representations in a way that individuals without such privilege cannot (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997).

The second and overarching framework for analysis was Archer's (1995), morphogenetic approach. The method facilitates analytic dualism to analyse the component parts of the social world, culture, structure and agency effectively and to avoid conflation of one with another in the search for causation (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, 1978). Temporality as a tenet of the morphogenetic approach forced the research to consider not only the timeframes involved in the descriptions of events but also the histories and nature of events therein described. Combined with analytic dualism and a theory of situational logics (Archer, 1995), the temporal element allowed structures (social or cultural), and agents (corporate or primary), to be analysed discretely and relationally (Lipscomb, 2009). Although delivery of FiReControl was found to be inadequately managed (PAC, 2010; NAO, 2010), the methods of this study sought to reveal if there were causal mechanisms outside of the scope of Government evaluation methods, which *contributed* to inadequate reform ideas gaining legitimacy, resulting in an imprudent, poorly evidenced project that inevitably went on to 'fail'.

Chapter 4 presented the data analysis and findings of the three-part morphogenetic cycle chosen for the study, designated as T¹, T² to T³ and T⁴. In this cycle the influences of cultures and structures and the mediating effects of agents were analysed and discussed in relation to the changing situation logics that emerged as social interactions ensued.

Chapter 5 discussed the research findings in relation to the gaps identified in the literature and the theoretical framework of legitimacy theory. The chapter discussed how, using the morphogenetic approach, the influences of cultures, structures and agents can be teased out over a temporal sequence and analysed separately. This revealed how causal mechanisms of legitimacy, both pre-existing and ones which developed dynamically (through social interactions), contributed to the legitimisation of the FiReControl project. The research questions will now be addressed specifically.

6.1 Research Question 1: How do cultural, structural and agential mechanisms enable and constrain the legitimization of public reforms?

Looking in different places than the project itself and searching for alternative causes for its future demise, Research Question #1 asked how cultural, structural and agential mechanisms enabled and constrained the legitimization of the FiReControl project. It is useful to define again that a mechanism in this sense is a causal structure that can trigger events (Bhaskar, 1998) and social mechanisms are "social processes having designated consequences for designated parts of the social structure" (Hedstrom and Swedberg, 1998, p.6). From the mechanisms created by both the conditioning structures and cultures at T^1 , as well as complex social interactions between T^2 and T^3 , outcomes emerged, whether intended or not (Archer, 1995).

The task of Research Question #1, was to identify how the complex interplay of these mechanisms produce emergent causal properties that legitimated the FiReControl project. The interplay of parts and people between T^1 and T^4 , resulted in situated and context dependent mechanisms of NPM (i.e. Blair's version), with causal properties of institutional legitimacy for New Labour's actions. Achieving the political goal of promoting Blair's modernisation ideology contributed positively to enactment of the reforms. Blair's New Labour and Prescott's personal ideologies for regional governance were both promoted in the 2004 Act. By 2004, Blair's Labour party was firmly embedded after almost two successful terms in office and re-election in 2005 would be paramount. During these years, new democratic-styled public sector reforms were progressing across Western governments as has been discussed. The movement had both industry and intellectual appeal at a time when the excesses of conservatism had temporarily discredited alternatives (c.f. McAnulla, 2007; Schafer, 2006).

The study found further causal mechanisms of rhetoric and coercion that resulted from the complex interplay of the contextual parts and situated people and groups of the social system (Labour and the FBU). Both groups contributed to the development of mechanisms that would legitimate their views. However, overall, the emergent properties of Labour's legitimating mechanisms proved more successful than those of the FBU due to the powerful agency they exercised over context dependent structures, such as political institutions, the political process and the media. For example, government rhetoric in its various forms was reinforced by taken-for-granted authoritative processes, such as the IRFS, management consultants, the White Paper and stage-managed communications with the public. All of these evidenced strategic legitimacy and it was deployed by Labour executives with greater aplomb than the FBU. The

case for reform was built on Labour’s rhetoric; binding that rhetoric into legislation was not difficult. The 2004 Fire Service Act was passed without contest from anyone whose voice could be counted. How this was achieved is the subject of the second research question.

6.2 Research Question 2: By what emergent powers do Government reform ideas prevail over alternatives?

6.2.1 Power shifts; the morphogenesis of agency

The temporality of the morphogenetic approach enabled ‘visibility’ of where power resided at the start of the sequence, when the long-established authority of the FBU was able to resist changes imposed by the new Government. The approach also showed how throughout T^2 to T^3 , power oscillated between the competing groups. Finally, it would reveal how, facilitated by emergent properties of legitimating mechanisms, the balance of power shifted. The shifts changed the situational logics enabling the Government to realise their ideological interests. How this happened will be now be discussed. The focus of research methods that advocate the principal of analytic dualism is that neither cultures, nor structures nor agents have primacy in explaining the social world (Bhaskar, 1975; 1978; Archer, 1995; 1996; Mutch, 2010). Rather, it is the results of the interactions of pre-conditioned social agents that are passed up the structural and cultural systems, and on to subsequent generations as new conditioning influences (Archer, 1995). This helps explain structural and cultural remodelling. However, it is important to recognise the same sequence by which agency is itself transformed by interactions and in return is transforming in the “double morphogenesis of agency” (Archer, 1995, p.74). In this study, whilst morphogenesis of structures preceded that of cultures (as the Fire Service Act first legislated for *structural* reforms at T^4 that would eventually disrupt and change *cultural* norms in a later timeframe outside of this one), it is *within* the cycle that agency was transformed (Figure 15).

Socio-cultural conditioning of groups

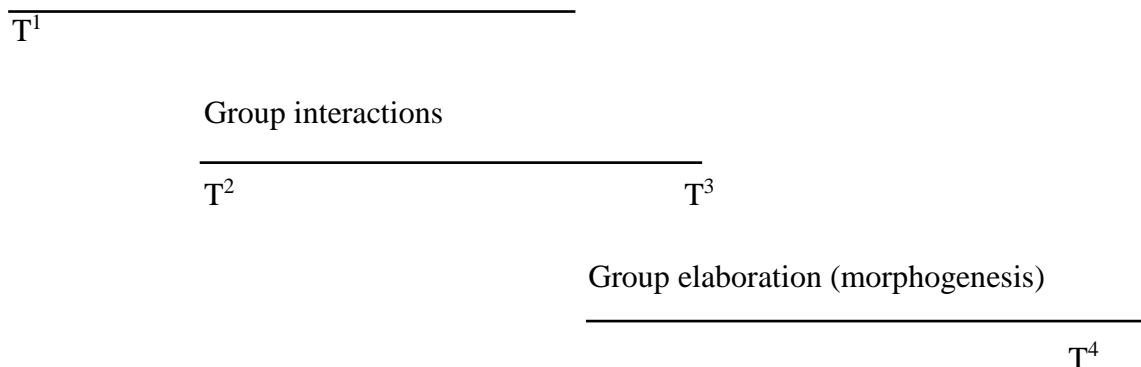


Figure 15. The morphogenesis of Agency (Based on Archer, 1995, p.194)

The concept of agency was introduced in Section 3.5.2.4, referring to the reflexive and purposeful actions of people and the choices they make in their daily lives (Barker, 2003), that reinforce existing structures and cultures or transform them (Archer, 1996). Agency is dynamic and agents in different settings have different emergent properties (Horrocks, 2009). People can possess agency as individuals, as people with roles and positions, and as groups and collectivities who may be more or less powerful in decision-making situations (Archer, 1995). There are two types of agent, the corporate and the primary agent (Bourdieu, 1986; Archer, 1995, 2009; Scott, 2001; List and Pettit, 2011). Corporate agents have the capacity to influence stability and change, whilst primary agents lack a say in structural or cultural modelling in either society or in a given institutional sector. In this study, the emergent powers of each of the two main groups, the Labour executive and the FBU leadership fluctuated and as such so did their agency.

Through interest groups in decision-making arenas, corporate agents engage in strategic actions that effect outcomes (Willmott, 2000). Their corporate agency enables self-declared goals within a pre-existing social context to be pursued, where these agents will shape and re-shape that context for all actors (Archer, 1995; 2000; 2003). At T^1 and part way through T^2 to T^3 , the FBU were, in respect of pay and of structural and cultural ‘management’, the corporate agents in the arena of the fire service and had thus maintained this status quo throughout the previous decades (pre- T^1). Local authority employers and government ministers had been similarly situated but as taken-for-granted routines become accepted over time, they had been the primary agents with less say in matters of fire service management. For some time this had suited all involved and had been reproduced as structural and cultural norms. Though not immediate, since the Local Government Act 1999 and Best Value had little structural and cultural impact, New Labour policies began to challenge the domination of the FBU in the management tripartite, whose considerable vested interests had reproduced the protectionist situational logics.

The transformation or morphogenesis of agency in this specific unit of analysis (morphogenetic cycle), started with the consolidation of new corporate actors who were committed to asserting their views and ways. These were the new executives in a new Labour party; John Prescott, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Early in the cycle, the FBU’s powerful positioning, beliefs and

pursuit of its long established vested interests, had impeded the new Prime Minister, Tony Blair and his early visions to modernise the public sector. Whilst New Labour asserted Government authority, initially they were not able to emerge easily as corporate agents and therefore not in a position to shape and reshape the fire service context for their own ends (Archer, 1996; Mutch, 2010).

At T¹, the FBU was more established than New Labour, they were strong and defended their privileges as corporate agents. They had, through many years acquired considerable bargaining power, which, as an emergent relational property, defines who can bring what kind of resources to bear in the struggle to promote vested interests when challenged (Archer, 1996). At T¹, the FBU had the support of rational and trusted groups through the strength of the wider union movement and their public sector members, and a considerable and loyal membership of their own. To become the corporate agents, whose strategic actions would enable their version of modernisation, New Labour would need to bring to bear the right resources to undermine the basis for domination that FBU held. They would need to promote a strong and legitimate counter ideology to confront the entrenched vested interest group. Labour needed the capacity to influence stability and change. “For only those who are aware of what they want, can articulate it to themselves and others, and have organized in order to get it, can engage in concerted action to re-shape or retain the structural or cultural feature in question” (Archer, 1995, p.258). The research has shown how, through a series of complex social interactions mediated by agents, conditioned by and influential to their experiences, the agency of the New Labour executive was transformed through powerful sources of legitimacy.

New corporate agency “usually results from alliance formation, goal dilution and ideological accommodations from the interest groups who constitute it in order to become an effective force” (Archer, 1995, p.266). The powerful effects of political rhetoric have been discussed. The commissioning of the IRFS was an attempt to promote and endorse, through the legitimating power of the Government review process, a counter ideology to the FBU’s version. When Bain’s IRFS failed to settle the pay dispute, the subsequent threat to force changes using legislation was another push on the newer ideology. Despite many limitations to the credibility of the IRFS, the 2003 White Paper written in direct response to the review became the benchmark reference justifying the Government’s modernisation agenda. The White Paper would also make emotive links to the new terrorist threat, since the 2001 World Trade Centre attacks, and the state of the nation’s security and preparedness entered the rhetoric for fire service reform.

Government changes to recruitment meant a new breed of Chief Fire Officers would be hired for their managerial and commercial acumen and not hand-picked from the ranks by the Union, as had been the tradition. Changes to local Government under the Local Government Act (1999) and Blair's increased engagement of external management consultants would form the new alliance required to acquire corporate agency. As we progress through the temporal sequence of T^2 to T^3 , through the long and bitter disputes, agency is transforming; the FBU were becoming the new primary agents in the battle to design the future of fire service structures and New Labour were becoming the corporate agents with greater power to shape the fire service in the manner of Blair's modernisation agenda. Towards the end of T^3 and from T^4 onwards, there is little further challenge for the radical changes that followed.

Gradually the NPM agenda of New Labour would reform structures and erode the corporatist culture of the fire service and progressively disempower the incumbent corporate agents, the FBU. During this time, Labour's new alliance (required to 'seize' corporate agency), gained strength through social and cultural interactive twists and turns within the morphogenetic cycle. Employing numerous legitimacy-building devices, the counter ideology gained strength too, culminating in the powerful White Paper to communicate the Government's way forward, and then the final act of power, the Fire Service Act itself. The corporate agency of the FBU was now undone and they were relegated to the new primary agents; they had to respond to and take new options, or leave them and lose power in the future.

The information purveyed by the new corporate agents was strategic. Critical hermeneutic methods revealed considerable manipulations shaping and distorting details to advocate the Third Way ideology of the new, more powerful agents. For example, the Government's agency enabled their selective use of certain evidence to legitimate their policy, and concealment of other evidence that contradicted those policies.

That the FBU became the new primary agents in this case study, has more to do with their inability to manipulate information and stage-manage media communications as well as the corporate agents did. The FBU also hired independent consultants to scope organisational reforms that would improve efficiency across the fire service. Those reform configuration alternatives, which had involved stakeholders from the sector, may have aligned better to successful implementation and to the fundamental objectives of the fire service than the ideological, economic and fiscal objectives of the Blair's modernisation agenda.

The unobservable mechanisms of legitimacy in its strategic and less obvious institutional forms, contributed to the morphogenesis of agency for the Labour party. This enabled their ideological goals to be achieved and constrained alternative courses of action. Figure 16 offers a schematic representation, showing more visible sources of legitimacy above the red line as well as the less visible institutional sources, below the red dotted line.

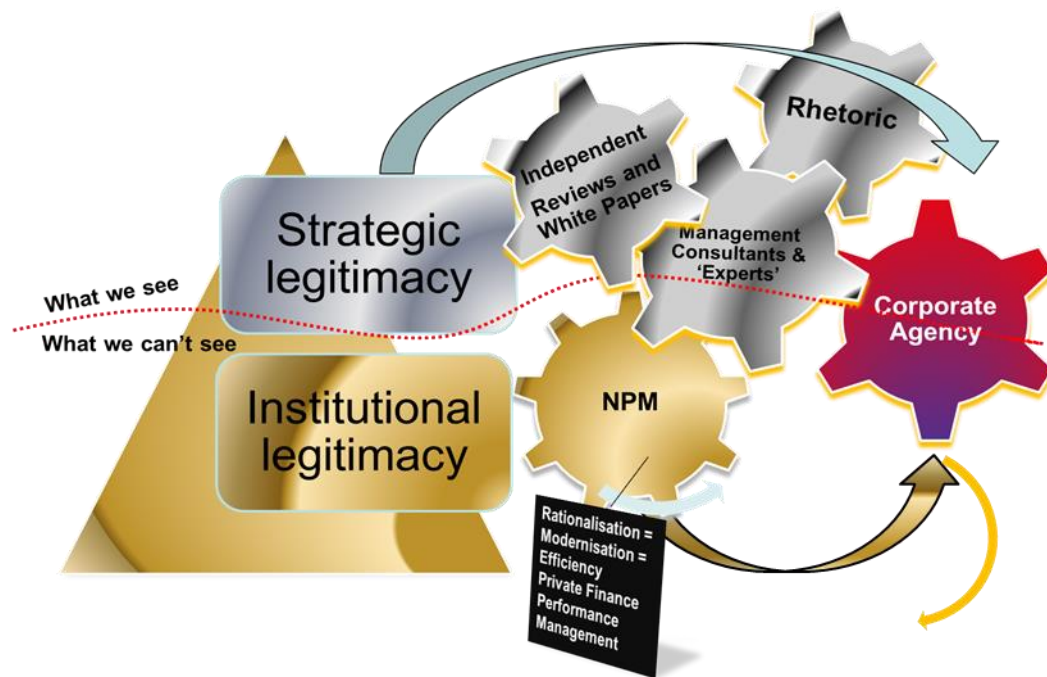


Figure 16. Schematic representation of agency building through mechanisms of legitimacy.

6.3 Research Question 3: How can causal mechanisms of legitimacy influence the scope of reform projects?

In the case of FiReControl, identifying and linking the causal mechanisms of legitimacy to the final reform project scope illustrates the influence of institutional legitimacy of NPM and the strategically deployed rhetoric that gains legitimacy through management consultant reports and the Government-commissioned reviews. Blair's ideology for a 'new Britain' was based on new democratic politics and his ideas for the state were based on NPM. The rhetoric of partnerships, public-private finance and joined up Government were key tenets of Third Way public management politics (Coates and Lawler, 2000). All were reflected in the FiReControl project scope. FiReControl would join up 46 local emergency control room organisational functions using a single IT system deployed at nine regional control centres. Terms and conditions of staff working as uniformed fire service employees in existing control rooms would cease as the function transferred to the regional network. The centres would operate as limited companies and staff (hired through selection), would be employed on private company contracts and new terms and conditions. The limited companies providing the 999 service contract, would partner the adjoining fire services. Physically, the nine regional control centres would be constructed to protect against the new threats to national security (for example, terrorism and floods). The locations corresponded to the English regions identified for Prescott's regional assemblies that had not succeeded. Based on the historical account of social interactions re-told in Chapter 6, which revealed political agendas of Blair (public sector modernisation), and Prescott (regionalism), as well as Labour's changing narrative of fire service reform imperatives (efficiency, modernisation and finally national security), it is possible to see the links to the final project scope.

In view of the paucity of evidence established by the 'experts' (Mott MacDonald, 2000; 2003; Bain et al., 2003; ODPM, 2003), it suggests a good deal of the project scope was related to political aspirations of the New Labour ideology. For example in the final 2009 revision, the FiReControl Project scope included;

- *Design and construction of new control centres, in the regions, in accordance with national security requirements (DCLG, 2009, p.185).*

Regional restructuring and national security concepts were introduced to the narrative about

fire service reform in the Government's 2003 'Our Fire and Rescue Service' White Paper (Text 3). They had had not been considered fire service reform imperatives in the 2002 Independent Review of the Fire Service published six months earlier (Text 2).

- *"Identification and selection of Regional Control Centre (RCC) locations"* (DCLG, 2009, p.185).

The Regional Control Centres were constructed of aluminium and glass and many were built on retail parks at the side of arterial motorways or in the case of London, in built up urban areas. If their locations were selected based on national security requirements, shopping centres and motorways and glass would contradict the intentions for heightened security.

- *"Design of new regional and national organisation and management structures, including job descriptions"* (ibid, p.185).

This reflects the move towards privatising the emergency control room function of the fire service. Existing control room staff who wished to move to a Regional Control Centre would be re-employed in the new limited companies on non-fire service terms and conditions or leave the service. The new employment contracts would place employees out of the fire service and therefore out of the FBU membership.

- *"Formulation of performance standards (service level agreements) between the RCCs and FRAs"* (ibid, p.186)
- *Establishing a Performance Standards framework to ensure appropriate standards are crystallised which enable network resilience. To (potentially) include some nationally set standards"* (ibid, p.186).

These elements of the project scope reflect NPM, clearly evidencing Labour's aspirations for the institutionally legitimated concepts of managerialism and performativity in the public sector and Prescott's regional agenda.

6.4 Research Question 4: How do government evaluations account for such antecedent influences in delivering lessons learned after implementation failure?

The evaluation approach taken by a PAC inquiry begins with the assumption that a project has the capacity to achieve its objectives having passed through the Government gateways of approval before initiating and at key stages of implementation. From this foundation the PAC, in considering NAO auditor reports on project spending, undertake to interview a selection of ‘witnesses’ to establish what went wrong when a project has been deemed to have failed. It is clear from such an approach that a longitudinal perspective to explore the antecedents of the project and a multi-level view of the policy-making process is not in scope. This research does not set out to discredit the PAC process but suggests it is *insufficient to learn lessons* about ‘failure’. Thus, in the case of FiReControl, PAC did not account for the causal mechanisms revealed by this study, nor did it challenge the un-evidenced link between the project scope and Labour’s political agenda. For example, had the PAC evaluated the government’s definition of ‘modernisation’ against the cultural backdrop of New Labour in relation to the rooted structural and cultural institution of the fire service (which despite Bain’s report had performed well in relation to saving lives and putting out fires), it may have been possible to expose the fact that the fire service and the FBU had also offered modernisation proposals in the form of consultant reports throughout the process. This was concealed in what became the government’s main reform document (IRFS), as were the views of the fire service in general. Alternative reorganisation options were available, and fundamentally, the regionalisation option was contested, even by Bain and Mott MacDonald. Therefore, the conclusion;

- *The Department failed to secure the co-operation and support of local Fire and Rescue Services*

...may have been different had there been a democratic agreement on what modernisation was to look like beyond the ‘New Britain’ ideological version of Labour’s manifesto.

The PAC report of the failure of FiReControl lists the other *causes of failure* as;

- *The Department failed to apply effective checks and balances from the start.*
- *The Department’s management and oversight of the project was weak.*
- *The Department failed to manage delivery of the IT system by the contractor.*

- *Despite the scale of failure and waste, no one in the Department has been held accountable.*

Each of the above demonstrates the narrow, project-bound view the PAC takes and the fundamentally *conflationary* conclusions it draws based on the foundational assumption that the project reached an objective state of failure in 2010. On this assumption, and using functional frameworks of evaluation, they determine the agential ‘failings’ in financial, project and contractor management.

This research does not challenge the reality of complex project management where it is highly probable that delivery agents can and do underperform. However, the study refutes the notion that this is the end of the story in determining causal mechanisms that contribute to projects not completing or achieving intended aims. Could the PAC have challenged and explored interpretations of taken-for-granted definitions of reform and looked more broadly beyond value for money reports and (potentially biased), witness retrospective accounts, the inadequate management they found may have also been considered emergent from deeper issues resulting from the legitimization of ideas, which had overlooked key facts in the ideations stages. Ideas based on rhetoric and not evidence will prove difficult to implement.

The final summary recommendations of the PAC report;

- *The Department must ensure that the further £84.8 million it now intends to spend to obtain the original objectives of the FiReControl project is not wasted.*
- *The regional control centres remain empty and expensive to run (PAC, 2011, pp5-6).*

..suggests the foundational assumption that FiReControl could have delivered a successful solution, is still intact. PAC essentially orders the government to continue spending to achieve the original project objectives.

Audit and scrutiny bodies themselves can become subject to the institutionalism of public management frameworks and managerialism (Pollitt and Summa, 1997). The project-bound PAC inquiry, predating its investigation on the foundational perspective that FiReControl ‘failed’ in December 2010, over budget, under scope and over time, predictably summarised the project thus;

“This is one of the worst cases of project failure that the Committee has seen in many years. FiReControl was an ambitious project with the objectives of improving national resilience, efficiency and technology by replacing the control room functions of 46 local Fire and Rescue Services in England with a network of nine purpose-built regional control centres using a national computer system. The project was launched in 2004, but following a series of delays and difficulties, was terminated in December 2010 with none of the original objectives achieved and a minimum of £469 million being wasted” (PAC, 2011, p. 3).

As far as Government projects are concerned, the PAC report is one of the key sources of learning when projects do not complete. The implications of the flat ontology adopted by PAC for learning lessons, in relation to the problematic of the projects paradox (Flyvbjerg, 2001), means we commit the epistemic fallacy (Bhaskar, 1978). In other words by limiting our view and objectifying failure, we look for the same answers to the same problems. Yet projects continue to ‘fail’ or lose legitimacy and get cancelled at considerable cost.

What can be done to make a difference is the final research question which helps to make this study phronetic. The question will be answered in relation to the practical contribution the research makes, at the end of the next section.

6.5 Contributions to project management and evaluation

The research contributes directly to the fields of reform projects in terms of their management and evaluation and in relation to our extant sources of understanding of reform project failure:

- That failure is an objective state of reality that exists,
- Causes of failure can only be found within the boundary of the project itself, and
- That project-related people (agents) are usually to blame.

6.5.1 Understanding the concept of failure

The research makes a contribution to project management and evaluation theory by emphasising the importance of ontology in understanding reform project ‘failure’.

The purpose of lessons learned is to enable Government action to continually be refined to reflect what best achieves objectives and promotes the public interest (H. M. Treasury, 2011). Exercising authority to achieve collective purposes is the dominant paradigm in policy research

(Sanderson, 2000). The assumption here is that rational, clearly defined objectives indicate the capacity for effective achievement of goals. From this position, it is expected that equally rational goal oriented evaluation will provide sufficient evidence on attribution and causality in failed projects. This view may not only be inaccurate but also misleading, potentially contributing to why the performance paradox (Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius and Rothengatter, 2003) remains a reoccurring feature of public reform projects. This research makes a contribution by provoking the received notion that positivist paradigms are adequate for evaluating complex reform projects when they are perceived to have reached an apparently objective state of failure, such as FiReControl did in 2010. This study was based on an ontologically alternative interpretation of 'failure'; a loss of legitimacy.

The scoping of reform projects take place in the relatively unobservable realm of politics, in places not easily accessible to researchers and threads of political discourse to conceptualise or secure reforms can reach back over many years. The study demonstrated that by using a novel methodological approach to achieve greater ontological depth, as well as much broader inquiry scope, it is possible to 'illuminate' the less observable historic contexts at both the Government and organisational levels. In so doing, it becomes possible to more truly understand the legitimating mechanisms that are at play in public reform contexts. The study demonstrated the role legitimacy plays in idealising, winning support for *and* shaping the scope of Government reform projects. It found evidence for institutional legitimacy in the effects of NPM and for strategic legitimacy in the effects of rhetoric and Government office privileges such as commissions and the legislative process.

The research contributes to the project failure debate by asserting that it is through these legitimating mechanisms that ideas and narratives, developed through and by institutionalised beliefs embodied in rhetoric, gain credence and give form to reform projects, often after many years of social and political interactions between stakeholder groups. It is from these contexts, and the causal mechanisms therein, that organisational transformation ideas later emerge, which result in the events we can see as the delivery reform projects. The research makes a contribution by challenging what we think and how we come to know of project failure and reveals instead a much richer picture as well as the diverse sources of causal mechanisms that can influence project outcomes.

6.5.2 Looking beyond the boundary of the ‘failed’ implementation project for causal mechanisms that contributed to its legitimization

The research perspective sees the project delivery stage as *an aspect* of reforms and not the whole story. The study makes a further contribution to project management and evaluation theories by moving on the project-failure debate from resource-based, functional perspectives of delivery and evaluation stages. The study demonstrates new sources of understanding can be found if we look beyond the event – i.e. the project delivery stages, to the ideation stages and the genesis of ideas and look not for *causes* of failure but for *causal mechanisms that contributed to legitimization of those ideas*.

Through the adoption of critical realist approaches and social realist methods, the research demonstrates that Government projects as events and experiences in the domain of the actual and empirical do not just happen as the taken-for-granted routine activities, such as Government reviews, consultant reports and White Papers, suggest. They do not follow a linear path from problem-identification, evidence gathering, policy-making and solution assessment and design, for example. As the delivery projects are events and experiences that occur in open systems, the research confirms there are a number of unobservable mechanisms in the domain of the real that endure from previous morphogenic cycles of structural, cultural and agential interactions. Therefore, the situated influences of structures or of cultures on the power of agency within and between groups, illuminates the antecedents of project implementation stages and opens up the field of inquiry to the genesis and legitimization of project ideas. Here we can explore "deeply intertwined issues of power, politics, donor dependencies, institutional arrangements....and can open up that black box of accepted ways of doing things as an aid to deeper understanding (Walsham et al., 2007, p.324), so we might know more about how some ideas gain legitimacy over other ideas, from which projects emerge.

If the boundary of inquiry for PAC or NAO evaluations is restricted to the project delivery stage and their assessment is only ever related to project controls and budget management criteria, underperformance will inevitably lead to the same conflated conclusions that these shortfalls *are* the causes of failure.

6.6 Contribution to Realist Social Theory

6.6.1 Acknowledging the interplay of both ‘parts’ and ‘people’ in the history of emergence of reforms

It was by looking outside of the taken-for-granted boundary of Government inquiry that the research methods enabled the separating out of the relevant parts and people, the interplay of which was instrumental to legitimating FiReControl. Due to the concept of temporality, it was possible to identify structures and cultures laid down by previous cycles (such as previous Government administrations), which have autonomy from agency and exert a causal influence upon it. As was revealed in this case, the antecedents of failure of the FiReControl reform project could be traced back through the temporal sequence, to decisions and actions by agents who were both influenced by pre-existing structures (e.g. NPM) and cultures (e.g. previous Governments in power) and agentially-influential to them at their intersection of time (e.g. new democratic politics, modernisation agenda). This represents a contribution to realist social theory and to the morphogenetic sequence approach. In particular the research identified the morphogenesis of agency between groups as corporate agency diminished in one group (FBU), and developed in another (Labour executive) over the unit of analysis in the T¹ to T⁴ sequence. Labour’s corporate agency shaped the fire service reforms around Blair’s ideological vision for the public sector. The research identified a significant lack of empirical evidence to support those reform policy ideals. These findings contribute to the opinion that in reforms, Governments do not so much act in the general public interest, rather they deliberately create or redefine a public interest to protect particular, private interests (Kemp et al., O’Riordan, and Purdue, 1984), and use tools at their disposal, enabled by their corporate agency to endorse and further those interests.

6.7 Contributions to Practice: What can be done to make a difference?

Research Question 5 asked, what can be done to make a difference? The study responds to Flyvbjerg’s (2001), call for social science to concern itself with society’s improvement and to enter into public dialogue and praxis (Schatzki, 2006). In its aims to be phronetic research, the study was grounded in contextual knowledge and sought to be more “inclusive of values and groups that are legitimate and pertinent to the issues but who may have been marginalised by other more powerful groups had they not achieved a voice through phronetic research” (Flyvbjerg et al., 2012, p.286). Accounting for boarder contextual knowledge and greater inclusivity of values and groups relevant to the antecedents of FiReControl, the research set

out to search for causal mechanisms that contributed to its failure beyond project delivery agents.

A phronetic approach to understanding this case would be sceptical of the PAC methodology alone to provide definitive answers after FiReControl ‘failed’. In the top-down process of PAC inquiries, theories of project management and evaluation precede the analysis, and it is these which are applied to the question of project failure. Social and particularly political action are complex and require knowledge of context that is not accessible through theory alone (Flyvbjerg et al. 2012). The study acknowledged the value of context and sought to answer the four value-rational questions that stand at the core of social science (Schram, 2006; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Flyvbjerg et al. 2012);

1) So what?

2) What can be done to make a difference?

3) Who gains and who loses, and

4) By which mechanisms of power?

5) What can be done to make a difference? (Flyvbjerg, et al., 2012).

These were not the research questions but they helped to shape them and underpinned the research aims to make a contribution to project management and evaluation theories.

In relation to project failure, the first value-rational question asks;

6.7.1 So what?

Public project failure at the rate the UK is currently experiencing is not sustainable (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2012). Despite the Government’s added support and scrutiny agencies that have been established to oversee public projects (e.g. Major Projects Authority), the National Audit Office remains concerned about the potential failure of major public sector projects and has predictably warned of the need to improve *project delivery*. The latest NAO report highlights that a third of projects due to deliver in the next five years are rated as being in doubt or unachievable, if action is not taken to improve delivery (NAO, 2016). Not only do project failure rates continue to increase, agents tasked with understanding why continue to look in the same place; project delivery. The second value-rational question asks;

6.7.2 Who gains and who loses?

What is situationally conditioned is the promotion or defence of vested interests that have been previously established in a prior socio-cultural context (Archer, 1996). In the case of structural reform of the fire service, the situationally-conditioned New Labour leaders promoted ideas that reflected their vested interest in the new democratic movement and the NPM agenda it embraced. Originally, at T^1 , these ideas and propositions stood, in relation to the traditions of the fire service, as contradictions to their vested interests, the emergent properties of which formed situational logics of protection. When challenged through the Government directives and policies, the situation logics transformed relations towards competition. The competition logics thus determined the particular courses of action and episodes of interaction (Mutch, 2010), that ensued through the bitter disputes of 2001 to 2003. The emergent properties of the various interactions between the Labour and the FBU fluctuated within the situated contexts. Sometimes the emergent properties were characterised by tension and other times by coherence. On occasions the situational logics of compromise led to the FBU repeatedly calling off strike action and agreeing to the reduced pay offers. The loyalty of the FBU leader towards the values of the Labour party contrasted with Labour leader's attitudes towards the unions was a small but important piece of information in relation to the alternating compromise and contradictory relations that ensued.

Answering the value question, Labour gained and the FBU lost and the national reform FiReControl project was included in a list of structural reforms. Following the cancellation of the project five years later, after spending almost £500m of public funding, ultimately the fire service and the tax payer were the losers. In 2011, when the Government conducted its routine PAC inquiry to find definitive causes for failure, delivery agents were blamed. By then, the origins of ideas and the threads of their legitimacy were no longer observable in the realms of the event itself. The third value-rational question asks;

6.7.3 By which mechanisms of power do they (the Government), gain?

The lack of certainty or indeterminacy as to the outcomes of change in the morphogenetic sense is partly a consequence of what kinds of agency particular groups of people are able to exercise (primary agency, corporate agency or as individual social actors in particular roles (Lipscomb, 2009). Early in the cycle, the FBU were the corporate agents, that is, the self-conscious interest group who had (morphogenetically speaking), through decades of integrated solidarity, organised themselves to undertake collective action in order to achieve a particular articulated demand or ideal (Archer, 1995). At T^1 , the FBU had their articulated goals of trade unionism

and worked collectively towards achieving them for the fire service. In relation to the FBU as the corporate agents, around 1999, New Labour were temporarily the primary agents. Effecting structural change in the fire service had been easily resisted. The morphogenetic approach illuminated the social interaction between primary agents and corporate agents over the period designated between T^2 and T^3 . In the process, Archer's third category of human agency emerged – individual social actors who fill particular social roles, dialectically changing their personal identities and the social role as they do so (Archer, 1995). It was by this power through corporate agency that Government ideas were legitimated and ultimately prevailed over alternative ideas (as detailed in Section 6.2.1).

6.7.4 What can be done to make a difference?

Functionalist methods and Government lessons learned processes overlooked the ideological influences that instigated, framed and sustained legitimacy in the FiReControl project. Yet it is these impacts that had considerable effect on seemingly rational actors escalating their commitment to the project and continuing to do so despite it appearing to be a failing course of action (ODPM Gateway Report, 2004).

If we are to make a difference to reform project failure, social realism can help us to ask different questions of failure to explore how powerful groups such as politicians can “pack more punch in defining and redefining structural forms” (Archer, 1995, p. 191), and promote their own interests to define and redefine organisational goals, even when evidence is lacking. The nature of a networked Government, where a small group of large management consultancy firms are engaged to provide expertise, results in recommendations that serve to reinforce the rhetorical discourse of Government and legitimate ideas for reform. With so many unsuccessful reforms, we should ask how much network learning (Knight and Pye, 2013), is taking place? When the familiar process of the PAC report publication is complete, reform projects begin again using similar Government networks with similar ideological goals. Social realism can help us to know what is situationally conditioned in the promotion of ideological vested interests, what goals are sought by groups acting with agency and what situational logics will predispose them to act in certain ways (Archer, 1995), and to achieve their goals. Coupled with a critical and phronetic approach to reveal more of the power and value issues (Flyvbjerg, 2001), both frameworks enable researchers to develop more effective suggestions towards what can be done to make a difference.

The research argues that the taken-for-granted elevation of Government evaluations (PAC), as our primary means of learning from failed Government projects as being better than other methods, can both obscure the agendas and political motivations (conscious and unconscious) of reform project formation and approval, and of the failed project evaluations that follow. Despite continuous public sector reorganisations towards achieving efficiency, results from joined up collaborative endeavours are not always convincing, and the “continued appeal to policy-makers can appear to be an expression of faith, underpinned by an unquestioning acceptance of its apparent virtues” (Sullivan et al, 2013, p.123). By looking behind the processes and methods to challenge the taken-for-grantedness of NPM-style reforms and the privileged evidence from their evaluations, it may be possible to approach ‘truer’ lessons in understanding failure. To operationalise this contribution, decision-making processes that would legitimate both the shape of a proposed public sector reform and the decision outcome should be subject to truly democratic scrutiny, outside of Government spheres, where the ultimate authority does not lie with ministers, and the power to challenge is not singularly within their gift.

6.8 Limitations to the research

This study has three main limitations to address: the use of the single-case-study strategy, its dependence on secondary data and its interpretation of the morphogenetic approach. Each will now be addressed.

Overall justification for the single-case-study approach using document sources as empirical data is made by the research focus on the *process* of legitimating a Government reform, the research questions asked and the theories and methods used to answer them.

6.8.1 Single case study approach

As a single case study, the findings have limited generalizability. As has been discussed throughout the study, the research advocates that ‘failure’ of Government projects is not an exact state that ‘exists’. Some projects are considered successful, despite budget and time overruns, and others can be completed on time and within scope and budget, yet are considered failures. Notwithstanding the ontological challenge to the concept of project failure, as events, projects are temporarily situated and contextually driven. In different empirical settings, a similar study of another large Government reform project may return different results. However, applying the findings to other reforms such as in the NHS or education sector or in

other ideologically framed schemes such as High Speed 2, it is likely to reveal evidence of corporate agency for legitimating and shaping the delivery projects.

However, in stating its phronetic intentions at the outset, this research does not claim universality in its interpretation of events, but aspires to contribute to understanding beyond the taken-for-granted and conflated notions of project failure.

6.8.2 Documentary data

The research was based on a wide collection of publicly accessible documentary data, such as Government documents, parliamentary transcripts, published reports, situated academic research, media coverage and archival material. Reliance on only document sources may lead to bias through selection, which may undermine the reliability and the validity of the findings (Silverman, 2013). However, as detailed in Chapter 5, documentary evidence was deemed to be of greater value than primary sources due to the nature of the inquiry which was unlikely to achieve personal involvement from the key agents discussed. Furthermore, the concrete (empirical), analysis method (critical hermeneutics), aimed to recreate a real-time context by analysing texts against their original contexts, where there were no ethical issues imposing on participants' recollections years later. Therefore, the data types are considered consistent with the objectives of the research and with the methods approach adopted. Furthermore, measures were taken to compensate for data weaknesses. Data was collected from multiple sources to triangulate findings and improve reliability.

6.8.3 Interpreting critical realism and the morphogenetic approach

The final limitation relates to the interpretation of the methodological approach. Archer's (1995), morphogenetic methodology might be considered abstract especially as it provides little prescriptive direction to researchers. Critical realist approaches are more about principles that guide than rules that regularise (Pawson et. al., 2005). The case study is based on the judgements of the researcher. In particular, the selected unit of analysis indicated a temporal sequence (T^1 to T^4), within which causal mechanisms were sought that give explanatory power to the thesis that there are other places to look when learning lessons after projects are considered failures. As such, this research makes explicit the role of the researcher's reflexivity throughout this process and this is explained further in Chapter 3, Section 8.3. The study acknowledges that objectivity cannot be offered, but crucially objectivity is not intended in critical realism. Instead, a window into reality through which that picture of reality can be triangulated with other perceptions (Healy and Perry, 2000), is the aim. However, to minimise

researcher bias in describing this picture of reality, a commitment to be reflexive whilst accounting for the value laden experience brought to the study was maintained. The underlying research intention was not generalisable knowledge creation but to add something to our understanding of public reform projects that was not perhaps known before.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

DCLG's response to my request for information in relation to Government's approach to procuring Mott MacDonald and George Bain for the consultations and resulting reports (as analysed in the research). This followed a number of earlier emails which were also denied progress (example below the letter).

Department for Communities
and Local
Government
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF
Telephone: 030 3444 0000

Ms Colette Russell
Date: **21 October 2014**

Dear Ms Russell

Freedom of Information Act 2000

Thank you for your request for information received on 26 September 2014 concerning *procurement and other related information relating to the commissioning of Mott MacDonald in its 1999/2000 and 2003 reviews the operation of fire service control rooms; what the value of the Mott MacDonald's consultancy contracts were; what criteria were applied in appointing the company; and how many companies bid for the contract. Also the same procurement and other information relating to the commissioning of Professor Lord Bain in his Independent Review of the Fire Service, 2002, i.e. what was the value of the consultancy contract; what criteria were applied in selecting and appointing the 'expert'; and how many companies bid for the contract?*

From our preliminary assessment, we estimate that compliance with your request would exceed the appropriate costs limit under section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This is currently £600.00. We have decided to refuse the request because Due to the passage of time, we estimate that the cost of retrieving and extracting the information would exceed the cost limit of £600 provided under Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act as this information has been archived and could only be retrieved at disproportionate cost. The Act provides that we are not obliged to comply with requests where the estimated cost of complying would exceed this limit. Please contact me if you have any queries or concerns.

If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to ask for an internal review which should be submitted within two months of the date of receipt of this letter and should be addressed to:

Department for Communities and Local Government
Knowledge and Information Access Team
2nd Floor NW, Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London, SW1P 4DF
dclgia@icasework.fcgs.gov.uk

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the internal review procedure provided by the Department. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow,
Cheshire, SK9 5AF.
Phone: 0303 123 1113
Website: www.ico.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Lawrence

Senior Procurement Policy, Process, Data and Systems Manager
malcolm.lawrence@ccs.gsi.gov.uk

RE: FOI reference F0007025 - clarification letter. - Google Chrome
<https://owa.liv.ac.uk/owa/?ae=Item&a=Open&t=IPM.Note&id=RgAAAAABz%2fqpAs9lQ7fCVts%2fQDj4BwDBmRvM9%2fOhSLgJrqbj1t1uAABC>

Reply Reply All Forward

RE: FOI reference F0007025 - clarification letter.

Leo Musyoki [Leo.Musyoki@communities.gsi.gov.uk]

To: Russel, Colette [Colette.Russel@liverpool.ac.uk]
Cc: Paul Goodwin [Paul.Goodwin@communities.gsi.gov.uk]; FoI Requests [foirequests@communities.gsi.gov.uk]

13 August 2013 13:54

Hello Colette,

Thank you for your email, I appreciate you are disappointed with the response to your FOI request.

In your email, you suggest funding the cost of DCLG staff to deliver your FOI request, and you ask what the cost would be.

In response:

1. We cannot confirm what the cost of providing those documents would be until you identify exactly what documents you require. You have already been afforded the opportunity of meeting an official and working through the filing system to identify these documents. I must again reiterate that your request potentially runs into thousands, consume over 2GB of space, and would exceed the £600 cost limit.
2. For consistency; when an FOI request exceeds the cost limit we do not allow applicants to pay the cost and receive their information, and it would be inconsistent if we allowed this to happen now.
3. To conclude, our main reason for refusing your new suggestion is therefore that we need to be very careful in how we allocate staff time so that priority projects and activities are completed. Even if someone paid the cost of the staff time, this would not make extra staff resources available; we would not be able to spend the money buying in new staff, and even if we did they would require considerable training before they could take on the duties of an experienced civil servant.

Regards,
leo

Leo Musyoki
Future of Fire and Rescue Control Services
Fire and Resilience
Department for Communities & Local Government
3rd Floor, Eland House

sent to Jo dec...
Russell, Colet...
RE: FOI refere...
Full Draft 2.7...
Document1...
Fee notice %...
[239]
06:30 01/07/2016

Appendix 2

This request for information was entered into the Government website *'They work for you'* (www.theyworkforyou.com)⁴⁰

Thursday 28 February 2013

[Dear Lord Heseltine,

I am currently researching major project failures for my PhD at University of Liverpool. I have read with interest your report; 'No Stone Unturned' and your thoughts and insights into major projects, their role in economic growth and their tendency for failure and wasted public monies. I have worked for 12 years at senior levels of the Fire Service and was involved in both the Firelink and FiReControl reform projects (the latter was cancelled after five years and almost £500M spent, as you may be aware). I have tried through freedom of information requests to access detail on the FiReControl case study to assist with my research into a major project failure. DCLG have provided some, but certainly not all of their (non commercially-sensitive), project information, claiming it would take 'too long' and deeming my repeated requests 'vexatious'. I have written twice to my local MP (Louise Ellman), also a critic of major project waste but unfortunately I am yet to receive a reply.

Given your report's spotlight on some of the key issues in relation to project failure and the content of the inaugural speech you made during the recent naming ceremony of the Heseltine Institute at the University of Liverpool, can you offer any support/contacts/advice on how I might access DCLG-held information about FiReControl, which has been refused due to their 'time constraints'. My thesis is a constructive analysis of project failure. It does not seek to lay blame on individuals and I aim to make academic contributions to our understanding of public project failure beyond concluding it is down to poor project management and poor procurement. Please advise if you or your office can provide any further assistance to my research endeavours in relation to FiReControl information.

Yours sincerely

Colette Russell

Management School

University of Liverpool]

⁴⁰ 'They work for you' is a Government website which allows the general public to make requests for information and detail about what politicians are doing for their constituents or to request advice or guidance on the democratic process.

659157d85363329922e3/a333405c4234b70be317

(Signed with an electronic signature in accordance with subsection 7(3)
of the Electronic Communications Act 2000.)

This request was responded to on 6th March 2013. The letter is copied below.

The Rt Hon the Lord Heseltine, CH



Colette Russell
137 Hartington Road

6th March 2013

Dear Colette Russell

Thank you for your email of February 28th.

I regret I am unable to suggest any way to help you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Heseltine", written over a horizontal line.

The Rt Hon the Lord Heseltine CH

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